Pull Together Now: Putting the Patuxent Back into PRAD

By Sherrod Sturrock, Deputy Director for Education and Special Programs

Some thirty years ago two men stood on the shore of the Patuxent talking about the sad state of the once-thriving river. Bernie Fowler, then president of the Calvert County Board of Commissioners, was already championing the cause of the river, but his annual Broomes Island wade-ins were still ten years off. Dr. Ralph Eshelman, newly appointed director of the fledgling Calvert Marine Museum, was commiserating with Fowler. Fowler remembers Eshelman asking “If there is a Chesapeake Bay Appreciation Days festival, why shouldn’t we have one to celebrate the Patuxent River?” Why indeed? That passing comment planted a seed that grew into the Patuxent River Appreciation Days Celebration, affectionately known as PRAD, which has been held at the Calvert Marine Museum every Columbus Day weekend since 1978.

The Calvert County that celebrated that first year was a very different place. The population was around 26,000. State Route 2/4 was four lanes only as far south as Port Republic. The nuclear power plant and the Cove Point LNG Terminal had recently opened, and the Thomas Johnson Bridge was completed that year. PRAD was the biggest happening in Calvert County since the fair. It attracted around 10,000 people the first year – 39 percent of the population! That seemed an amazing success, but it was completely eclipsed by the second PRAD – which attracted between 30,000 and 50,000 people, depending on who was reporting. PRAD had captured the community’s collective imagination – an event where you could have fun and learn about the environment you lived in at the same time.

From the first year, the goal of PRAD was toward “generating public interest and understanding of the river’s economic, cultural, recreational, and esthetic importance,” words that found their way into PRAD’s mission statement. The festival atmosphere brought in the people: pie eating and oyster shucking contests, pony rides, games, boat rides, toy boat building, crafts, food, live music, and of course, the parade which attracted politicians of every stripe. There were also special guests like the year the Clydesdales were the featured attraction, or the sky divers, or Governor Harry Hughes, or Miss Maryland. Once here, people learned about the river, about the damage that nitrogen and phosphorous were doing to water quality, and the resulting loss of productivity and why it mattered in their lives.

It’s important to recognize that PRAD wasn’t conceived in a vacuum. Thirty years ago, a committed group of individuals pulled together on an unprecedented effort to force elected officials at the state and federal levels to attend to and correct the problems facing the Patuxent River. In 1978 the Boards of Commissioners of the three Southern Maryland counties, spearheaded by Commissioner Fowler, filed suit against EPA for failing to enforce their own environmental laws regarding the Patuxent River. Dr. Walter Boynton and other bay scientists from the Chesapeake Biological Laboratory provided irrefutable scientific evidence. Governor Hughes threw his full support behind the effort. In May 1980, the Patuxent River Watershed

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Seafood Packing Industry Exhibit Opened

On August 12 the museum officially opened its newest exhibit – “It Ain’t Like It Was Then”: The Seafood Packing Industry of Southern Maryland. A reception was held, with appropriate remarks recognizing and thanking those who made the exhibit possible. Those attending also toured the exhibit, located on the mezzanine level of the Exhibition Building. A large number of people contributed artifacts and information for the exhibit and for the accompanying publication with the same title as the exhibit. Visitors to the museum will enjoy viewing the photographs of approximately one hundred packing facilities in the three counties of Calvert, Charles, and St. Mary’s, along with oyster cans and many of the tools used in oyster shucking and crab picking. The 95-page publication, filled with photographs – many in color – and interesting details, provides a permanent record of the exhibit, and would make an excellent holiday gift. It is sold in the museum store for $4.95.

The Ralph E. Eshelman Paleontology Library and Osteology Collection

Recently, Dr. Ralph Eshelman, Calvert Marine Museum’s former director, donated two substantial and scientifically important collections to the museum’s Department of Paleontology. In recognition of this donation and his contribution to paleontology at the museum, the paleontology library has been renamed in his honor.

Dr. Eshelman’s library (some of which is shown here, along with the donor) includes thousands of paleontology and geology reprints, journal volumes, and historically important paleontology monographs and books. This valuable research and reference library has been catalogued by our collectors manager Pat Fink and paleontology volunteers Ilse Metz, Paul Berry, Vivian Aldridge, Barbara Lojacono, Bob Bohn, Bob Platt, and Ski Seidenstricker.

The Eshelman Paleontology Library has continued to grow thanks to the considerable efforts and advice of Paul Berry (CMM’s head librarian), and from generous contributions of books and reprints by Bob Platt, the Joe Miller Family, Carl F. Koch, Flo Strean, Pat Fink, Doug Alves, and Stephen Godfrey. Needless to say, the Paleontology Department would welcome any reprints, extracts, or books of fossil-related material that might be gathering dust on your shelves, which could be used to further augment our research collection.

Dr. Eshelman’s comparative osteology collection comprises the skeletal remains of approximately 170 specimens ranging from fish to amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals. Since the fossilized remains of vertebrates from Calvert Cliffs are related (some closely) to many living species, we often refer to his collection to identify more accurately fossilized mystery bones. Both collections have already proven to be a valuable resource and, needless to say, we are very grateful for the generosity of all those who have donated. (Helen “Pat” Fink and Stephen Godfrey)

STAFF NOTES

Dr. Joshua B. Smith, assistant to the curator of paleontology, joined the museum staff in late September. He has degrees from the University of Massachusetts and the University of Pennsylvania, and has extensive teaching experience and many publications. Other changes include a number of summer interns and education staff who left at the end of the summer season.
The crowd went wild for Big & Rich’s fireworks and flame-filled performance!
*Photo: Jeff Meng, Skipjack studios*

**Thanks to You!**

What an amazing season it has been! Trace Adkins, The Allman Brothers, and Big & Rich brought nearly 15,000 people to the museum grounds this summer, and helped raise much needed funds for our museum. We’d like to take this opportunity to thank those of you that supported our events and remind you of how important your ticket purchase is to the museum. Many forget that the concerts are designed as our biggest fundraisers; that just over 60 percent of the museum’s budget comes from county funds, but nearly 40 percent of the remaining annual budget needs to be raised through earned income like our concerts. We depend heavily upon our shows, as we would not be able to fund the staff it takes to teach our kids, build our exhibits, and preserve the history we have been charged with doing. THANK YOU!

We continue to strive to bring the best nationally touring acts to Southern Maryland so that our community can enjoy quality performances without making that long drive to D.C. or Baltimore. We are already gearing up for next season and are looking for your input. Enclosed is a survey about who you would like to see perform at the museum. We try to vary our choice in performers, but want to make sure we are meeting your needs. Please take the time to fill out and return this short survey, as we look forward to bringing you the entertainment you want! 🎵
Summer 2006 was filled with a variety of activities for children, many shown here. Some 2,300 visitors enjoyed Sharkfest! on July 8. The museum also offered eight summer camps for children from kindergarten through ninth grade that attracted almost seventy participants. The annual “Cradle of Invasion” weekend on August 4 to 6 continued its success from other years, with a stronger emphasis on the current military impact on Southern Maryland. Another weekend of boatbuilding on July 29 and 30 produced six boats made by the participants, and over sixty visitors were treated on August 18 to the movie, The New World, recounting the arrival of Europeans at the Jamestown settlement in Virginia in the first two decades of the seventeenth century, followed by a discussion of the movie by Wayne Clark and Dr. Kent Mountford. All in all, it was a wonderful summer at the museum.
Kindergartners at the “Indians and Colonists” summer camp try grinding corn. CMM photo by Lori Cole

A reconstructed shallop, similar to that used by Capt. John Smith to explore the Chesapeake Bay in 1608, was displayed at CMM during the month of August. The shallop will be visiting by water in June and August 2007 as part of the John Smith 400 Celebration. CMM photo by Bob Hall

An important part of the “Cradle of Invasion” weekend was the August 4 groundbreaking for the “On Watch” statue to commemorate the role Solomons played in World War II and to honor its veterans. County commissioners, other officials, and veterans participated. CMM photo by Bob Hall

A flame-thrower adds realism to a re-enacted landing during the “Cradle of Invasion” weekend. CMM photo by Bob Hall

CMM paleontology cataloger Helen “Pat” Fink helps middle schoolers identify fossils during the June program of the Maryland Summer Center for Junior Paleontologists, a collaboration among the museum, the State Department of Education, and Calvert County Public Schools.
Act created the Patuxent River Commission “to act as a central focus to deal with problems within the Patuxent River Basin.” In July 1980, the U.S. District Court ruled in favor of Southern Maryland.

Southern Maryland’s successful effort to mobilize the resources of the state to restore water quality in the Patuxent is a landmark case in environmental action...because it demonstrated that through determined and united efforts, responsive and effective local government officials could challenge existing federal and state policies, and bring about remarkable changes (Hodge 1988).

This was a movement people could buy into, and PRAD celebrated that accomplishment.

But twenty-eight years is a very long run for a festival. Over the years, the focus on the river got diluted. Competition from other festivals and events ate into attendance. New people moved in who didn’t remember the way the river used to be. The Patuxent was no longer the focus of PRAD — it was just another festival. But the river has never needed us more.

This year’s PRAD is the year to “Pull Together Now.” Like fishermen pulling in their nets, we must all work together to bring to fruition the goal of cleaning up the Patuxent River. On Friday, 6 October 2006, the Patuxent River Commission will hold the first ever “State of the River Summit.” It will reunite many of the individuals who participated in that earlier effort: Senator Fowler, Governor Hughes, Dr. Boynton, and others. They will tell us what has been gained, what has been lost, and the challenges we continue to face in our fight to save this river — a microcosm of the challenge to save the Chesapeake Bay. The Summit will take place from 1 to 5 p.m. in the museum auditorium.

True to its heritage, PRAD is not just about the challenges facing the Patuxent; it is also a celebration of the pleasure the river has given us for countless generations. On Saturday and Sunday more than two dozen advocates and non-profit groups involved in work on or about the river will line the “river walk trail” leading through the museum grounds. In market-style tents, they will offer demonstrations, displays, and activities focused on the river. Local musicians, including Ship’s Company, Scurvy Crew, Kindred Spirits, Calvert Brass Consortium, and others will play throughout the weekend in the Patuxent Music Tent. Children will be able to print fish T-shirts, build toy boats, race fiddler crabs, row a boat, and get their picture taken with Senator Fowler “wading in.”

The Wm. B. Tennison and The Nathan of Dorchester will provide free boat rides. The museum, featuring the otters, the newly opened seafood exhibit, and the renovated Discovery Room, is free all weekend. On Saturday, the Chesapeake Biological Laboratory is hosting an open house, with shuttle buses running from the museum to the lab throughout the day. On Sunday at 2:00 p.m., the PRAD
Parade will take place along the length of Solomons Island with Bernie Fowler as grand master accompanied by the museum otter. Across Solomons Island Road, local food vendors will sell shrimp and crabs, bar-be-cue, fried chicken and fish, and, of course, the all-American hot dogs and hamburgers. A juried craft fair with more than thirty local crafters will offer ceramics, jewelry, woodcarving, textiles, and fine art.

On Saturday, at 1:00 p.m., “Magpie” will perform in the museum auditorium. This husband and wife duo has played throughout the United States, sharing their family-friendly music with enthusiastic audiences. At 5:00 p.m. on Saturday, a special preview of Preacher for the Patuxent will be shown in the auditorium. Seven years in the making, this documentary about Senator Bernie Fowler explores this remarkable man and his single-minded focus on returning the river to the pristine water quality he grew up with. A discussion with Senator Fowler and the filmmaker Frank Cervarich will follow.

Patuxent River Appreciation Days is a time for pulling together to celebrate, contemplate, and rejuvenate our commitment to this beautiful natural waterway. Come and be part of the reinvention of this great Southern Maryland tradition.

Sources:
“Patuxent Appreciation Days Set For October 7th & 8th.” Calvert Independent. 16 August 1978: 1, 3.
“County Fair, PRAD Draw Record Crowds.” Calvert Independent. 10 October, 1979: A1
Hodge, Gary V. “The Long and Winding Road to a Clean Patuxent” Tri-County Council of Southern Maryland.
A Decade of Action: “Watershed” Events on the Patuxent
Volunteer Spotlight

By: Sherry Reid,
Volunteer/Event Coordinator

Summer is almost over and what a busy time it’s been for the museum’s many volunteers. Although the numbers aren’t in for August yet, July was the highest attendance on record: 10,830 visitors! Beginning with the Solomons Maritime Folklife Festival in May, and ending with a great Big and Rich concert in August (250 volunteers helped with that one!) it’s been a banner year. And none of this would have been possible without the help of our amazing volunteer corps.

On September 12 the Volunteer Council held its annual meeting in the museum auditorium for the election of officers for the coming year. All active volunteers are members of the Council, so all were invited to attend and participate. The election this year returned the officers from the previous year: Shirley Mihursky, president; Peggy Hovermale, vice president; Barbara Roberts, treasurer; Debra Carlson, recording secretary, and Nan Suydam, corresponding secretary. Sherry Reid, volunteer coordinator, greeted the group, announcing that volunteers contributed 18,362 hours to CMM during the past fiscal year. Sherrod Sturrock, deputy director for education and special programs, added greetings on behalf of the director who could not be present, and she and each department head had brief comments and thanks. A social hour in the lobby followed the meeting.

If you have ever thought of volunteering, I invite you to consider bringing your time and abilities here. We have opportunities to fit every temperament and talent. Enjoy people? Consider working the information desk or the store. Love Southern Maryland heritage—you’d be a perfect candidate for our docent program. Want to work with children? Our Discovery Room has a place for you. Not interested in the public but like research? Our library has many jobs for volunteers. Whatever your interests, we can put you to work in a rewarding and meaningful way. Call me: Sherry Reid, 410-326-2042, ext. 19.

Remember The Museum Store For Holiday Shopping

Smart shoppers will keep the museum’s store in mind as they shop for the upcoming holidays. There are wonderful gifts there — jewelry, clothing, fashion accessories, books, posters, and many other things. Museum members receive a 10 percent discount at all times (bring your membership card), but this is increased to 20 percent during the Solomons Christmas Walk, December 8 and 9, and also during the Members’ Yule Party on December 10. The store will provide free gift-wrapping from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on December 9.