

Seafood Festival Kicks Off National Seafood Month

By John Partin

October is National Seafood Month. The North Carolina Seafood Festival is a celebration of seafood, Morehead City and the sea. Its setting blends the tartness of the season and sea air with the irresistible aroma of cooking seafood in restaurants and booths lining the Morehead City waterfront.

The Crystal Coast will welcome over 180,000 attendees to the 29th Annual NC Seafood Festival, held October 2-4, as they enjoy fresh NC-caught seafood, three stages of live entertainment, interactive cooking demonstrations, the Southern Outer Banks Boat Show and the Blessing of the Fleet.

The Seafood Festival is a not-for-profit organization of Carteret County citizens and business people in conjunction with the town of Morehead City. It seeks to educate the public about seafood, promote the social and economic impact of the seafood industry, boost tourism and provide the opportunity for North Carolina nonprofit civic, church and educational organizations to raise funds through festival participation. Since 1987, over \$1.8 million has been disbursed among participating Carteret County nonprofit groups. In addition, festival leadership has established a scholarship fund for educational pursuits relative to the seafood industry.

Sponsored by the NC Department of Agriculture-Seafood Division, the festival is a perfect partner for the "Got to be NC" promotions of the overall NC Department of Agriculture that champion the products grown, raised, caught and made in North Carolina. These promotions mirror the goal of the North Carolina Seafood Festival to promote the commercial fishing industry and the buying of American-caught seafood and American-grown produce.

Earlier this year, National Geographic Travel named the North Carolina Seafood Festival as one of the Top 20 Free Festivals in the United States, the only NC event named to the list. Singled out in the recognition were the festival's delicious food; the interactive Cooking with the Chefs tent; and the time-honored tradition, Blessing of the Fleet.

A highlight of the festival is the Cooking with the Chefs tent. On Saturday, October 3, renowned chefs from across the state will stage exhibitions on how to prepare NC-caught seafood. On Sunday, chefs will compete in the Food Lion Cooking Challenge. The preparation will be a secret seafood and will be judged by a distinguished panel of judges. The public will be given the opportunity to taste samples of seafood and NC products that pair with seafood.

A popular Saturday and Sunday event is the flounder fling. Participants fling a flounder into a large frying pan—fun for all, but Miss North Carolina by tradition gets the first fling every year. Her good luck kiss to the first flounder will surely be a winner.

Entertainers perform on different themed stages beginning Friday night and continuing until Sunday afternoon. The Coastal Stage features folk and "Down East" music, and the SasSea Stage (named for the official mascot of the festival) offers programs to delight children and families. On Saturday night at 8 p.m., the Agri Supply main stage will feature Academy of Country Music Award nominee, Dustin Lynch. Broken Bow Records artist Lynch occupies a unique place in today's country music. Thanks to his classic sensibilities, he's been heralded as the heir to George Strait's throne. Opening for Dustin Lynch will be Emily Minor, who will also be singing the national anthem. Tickets for this event are available at ncseafoodfestival.org.

Capping off this evening's entertainment will be a fireworks display from Sugarloaf Island. Creating a spectacular sight reflecting off Bogue Sound, it promises to be the best fireworks display in North Carolina.

At the Blessing of the Fleet on Sunday, thanks will be given for our state's resource of seafood. This poignant ceremony pays tribute to those who bring seafood to the nation's tables and to those watermen who have lost their lives on the water making their living. The NC State Port hosts the ceremony, with participating boats gathered to honor the watermen and the sea.

Free parking will be available at the left side of the State Port near the phosphate facilities on Saturday and Sunday, with shuttle service to the festival. The gates for this facility at the port will be open Saturday 9 a.m.-2 a.m. and Sunday 10 a.m.-7 p.m. A welcome addition this year will be a shuttle service from Front Street Village in Beaufort, running on Friday 10 a.m.-5 p.m., on Saturday 9 a.m.-midnight and on Sunday 10 a.m.-7 p.m. The Beaufort shuttles on Friday will run on a one-hour rotation, and will run continuously on Saturday and Sunday.

Detailed information is available at ncseafoodfestival.org or on Twitter at #NCSeafoodFest. Plan a visit to this award-winning event and discover seafood, buy a souvenir, take a picture with SasSea and take home a memory.

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