

Seafood Festival Celebrates 30 Years

By John Partin

Thirty years ago, local chamber and business leaders envisioned that this area deserved a festival. These leaders knew the area was unique and easily set apart from other festival locales. The area was richly endowed with a seafood history and connection to the water. October is National Seafood Month and a beautiful coastal month. The idea quickly formed to celebrate both the rich history of this water community and seafood with a festival. Thus, the first NC Seafood Festival filled an October weekend on the downtown waterfront of Morehead City with the blessing of the city council and overwhelmed the founders with success. Now an acclaimed top free festival in the United States, the North Carolina Seafood Festival will welcome attendees with this 30th annual celebration on September 30-October 2.

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 boost tourism, introduce and educate the public to seafood, and promote the social and economic impact of the seafood industry. Sponsored by the NC Department of Agriculture—Seafood Division, it is a perfect partner for the “Got to be NC” promotions that champion products grown, raised, caught and made in North Carolina. North Carolina nonprofit and educational organizations, in addition to established scholarships for pursuits relative to the seafood industry, are the beneficiaries of funds raised.

Visitors to the Seafood Festival discover a mammoth outdoor experience. The highlights include an endless variety of seafood prepared in both traditional and unexpected dishes, street dances, concerts, arts and crafts, a popular flounder fling, an international award-winning chefs tent, games, fireworks, the Southern Outer Banks Boat Show, road race, sailing regatta, educational exhibits, hands-on programs for kids, rides and games.

The chefs tent, located at the corner of 4th and Evans streets, hosts a showcase event where renowned chefs throughout the southeast stage exhibitions on seafood preparation and cooking. On Saturday, beginning at 10 a.m., 50 guests will be seated each hour to watch an exhibition and sample a variation of “Trash Fish.” Trash fish cooking has been featured in many upscale publications, and refers to a growing appreciation for underutilized seafood or discarded “bycatch.” Participants in tasting are sure to be delighted and surprised. On Sunday, the Food Lion Cooking Challenge will feature eight chefs vying for the coveted Chef’s Hat award. A panel of four prestigious judges will narrow the field to two competitors and be joined by 25 randomly selected people to select the winner, a people’s choice.

The chefs event will also proudly have as an exhibition chef Holly Hedrick, cookbook author, food critic and chef from Charleston, SC. Ms. Hedrick will be an exhibition chef on Sunday, and will later be autographing her newest cookbook at Dee Gee’s Gifts & Books at 508 Evans Street.

Recognized name entertainers perform on three different-themed stages beginning Friday night and continuing until Sunday afternoon. At the Agri Supply Main Stage, Uncle Kracker will perform Friday night with opening act Brooke Eden. The headline event on Saturday will be Michael Ray with opening acts CJ Solar and Carly Price. Michael Ray is known for his debut single, “Kiss You in the Morning,” which reached number one on Country Airplay. Another hit, “Real Men Love Jesus,” aided his nomination of Breakthrough Male of the Year at the 2016 American Country Countdown Awards. Tickets for these concerts will be available at ncseafoodfestival.org.

Capping off this evening 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 are given for our state’s resource of seafood. The poignant ceremony pays tribute to those who bring seafood to the nation’s tables and to those watermen who have lost 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 for the festival is available on Saturday and Sunday at the NC State Port in Morehead City and includes a free shuttle to and from the festival. The port parking includes handicapped accessible spaces and a handicapped accessible shuttle. Other lots adjacent to the festival are operated by community groups, with most charging a modest fee. Designated handicapped accessible spaces are also available on the north side of Arendell Street between 7th and 8th streets and on the south side of Arendell between 8th and 9th streets.

Detailed information is available at ncseafoodfestival.org or on Twitter at #NCSeafoodFest. Explore and plan a visit to this award-winning event: discover seafood, buy a souvenir, take a picture with festival mascot SasSea and take home a memory. The North Carolina Seafood Festival—*where seafood and seafun meet.*



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