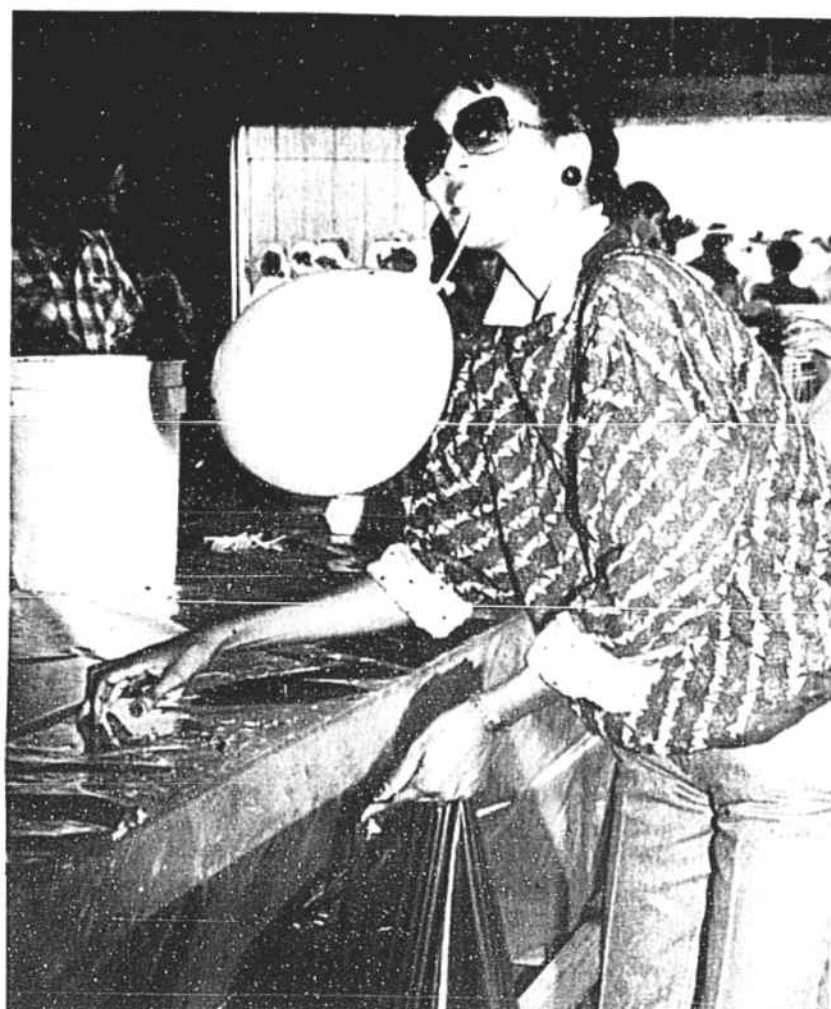


PEOPLE-WATCHING is a main attraction at fairs such as Saturday's N.C. Oyster Festival. Above, Stephen Shaw, a used car dealer from Florence, S.C., "chats" with a sock-puppet kitty bought at the festival. STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER



MYRTLE STEVENSON of Supply grabs a trash bag and starts cleaning tables in the shucking shed Saturday. Her daughters volunteered too, with other members of their Girl Scout troop. STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER



UH-OH! Jason, 15-month-old son of Beth and Mike Bauerschmidt of Holden Beach, reaches out to pet a friendly cocker spaniel puppy named Joey during the N.C. Oyster Shucking Championship and gets more than he bargained for—a wet doggy kiss in the eyes. STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER

Festival Was Money-Maker As Well As Good Time

The N.C. Oyster Festival is a weekend of fun and feasting for thousands, but for the South Brunswick Islands Chamber of Commerce, it's much more.

A major fundraising project for the chamber, it is also a focal point of efforts to bring identity to and to promote the South Brunswick Islands area as a destination.

This year's festival was not only bigger than ever, but better than ever, according to Chamber President Don Evans, in terms of both the operation of the festival and its net profits.

To accommodate its growth, this week the chamber created a new vice-presidency of the Oyster Festival. Dean Walters will fill the position, working full-time on next year's Oyster Festival along with Festival Chairman Bobby Davis.

"The festival has grown so much we have to have someone working on it year-round now," said Evans. He also noted a first—volunteers already signing up to handle specific booths at next year's festival, which will be held Oct. 22-23, the first weekend after oyster season opens.

An estimated 15,000 visitors attended this year's festival, with a decided impact on the local economy. Evans said a survey just made by the chamber of rental units, campgrounds and the like suggests that the Oyster Festival may have poured as much as a million dollars into the local economy during its two days.

For many rental businesses in the lower end of the county, he said, Saturday was their second peak day. "A lot of them said it was the largest crowd they have had since the Fourth of July."

The chamber also made money—more than ever before, he

noted, adding, "It was really nice." That was despite unanticipated expenses in obtaining oysters for the event.

Advance commitments for oysters from private beds in Pender and Onslow counties and South Carolina fell through at the last minute, according to Carolyn Sweatt, a chamber director. The chamber then had to pay \$29 per "short" bushel for Florida oysters—and was lucky to get them.

In turn, the chamber was only charging \$30 per bushel, with each bushel making three servings at \$10 per crate, served with hushpuppies and coleslaw on the side. While some patrons complained of the cost, said Mrs. Sweatt, the oysters were meatier than those usually served. "No one complained about not getting enough to eat," she added.

While essential to the festival, the roasted oysters were not a money-maker.

Despite the \$5,800 expense for 200 bushels of oysters in the shell, the festival posted record earnings of \$13,918, including \$5,000 in state "pork barrel" funds it didn't get last year.

Initial tallies indicate this year's festival realized a 25 percent net profit, with 27 percent more income than was budgeted. The festival posted gross expenses of \$25,624 and gross income of \$34,542.

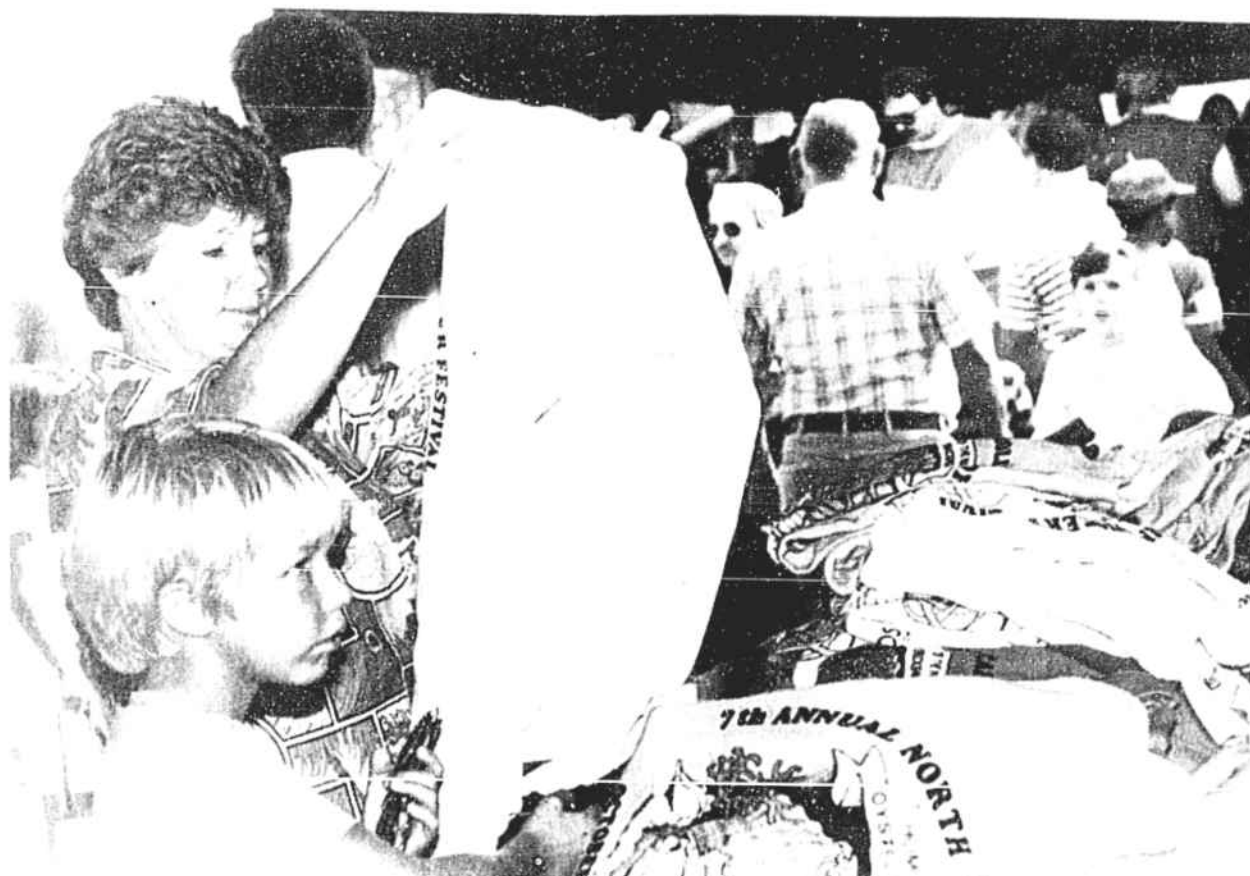
Evans said more profit was realized from arts and crafts booth rentals than in the past and profit was also made on the first of three limited edition prints to be sold in conjunction with the festival.



"BLESS" sings one of many Christian songs to an appreciative crowd Sunday. The Shallotte family includes (from left) Bobby, Kristi, Suzi and Ricky Lewis. STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER



"THE KINGSWAY" got Sunday's gospel music program at the N.C. Oyster Festival off to a fast start with their rendition of "Home Before Dark." The Shallotte group consists of (from left) Randy Worth, Dot Worth and Todd Amerson. STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER



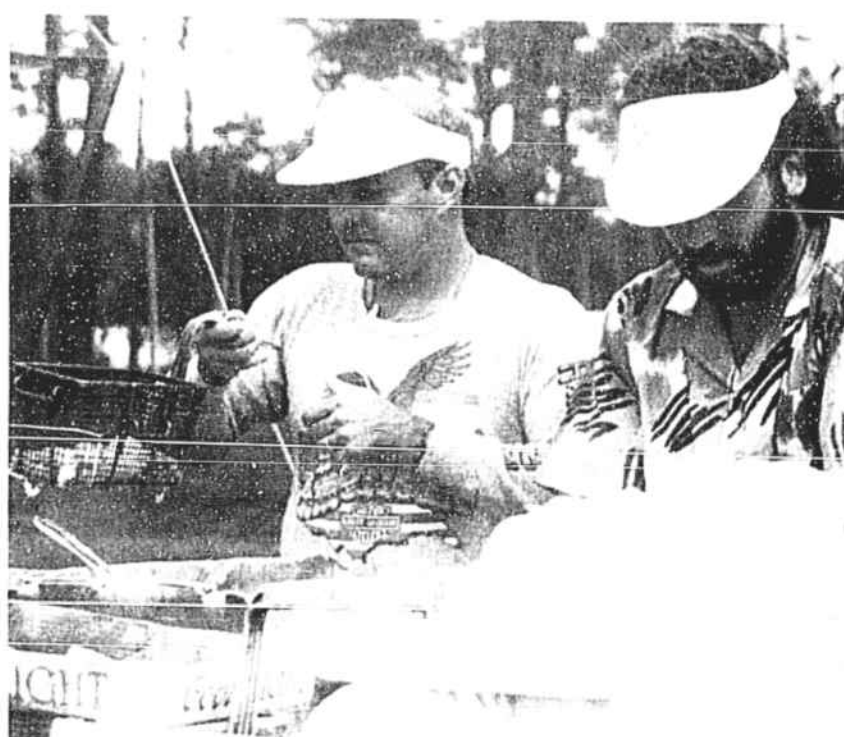
DEBBIE CASSETTA and her son, Bradley, of Greensboro, shop for souvenir sweatshirts Saturday during the N.C. Oyster Festival. STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER



PHYLLIS DANIELS was an unscheduled but well-received performer during the Oyster Festival Sunday. Here, she gives a stunning rendition of "Amazing Grace" a cappella. STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER



JOHN AND BERNICE DALBY came all the way from Toledo, Ohio, to taste the first oysters of the season, joining their grandchildren and other family members from Sanford for the Columbus Day holiday. STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER



THOUGHT THE FRIED OYSTERS WERE YUMMY? Thank Mike Edwards and Emerson Arnold, who manned the fryers all day Saturday. STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER



RANDY GALLAGHER of Seaside and "Cupcake," his Amazon parrot, pose for the camera of Neman Bates of Cherryville. Cupcake draws an audience wherever he goes. STAFF PHOTO BY SUSAN USHER