

At Dixon Chapel, It's Great Food, No Frills

BY MARJORIE MEGIVERN
Don't expect the area's top dance band or a group of cloggers or even background music at the Dixon Chapel oyster roast.

This is one event that has attracted hungry crowds every year since the 1950s with only one inducement—roasted oysters. Come to the Dixon Chapel Methodist church in Varnamtown any time between noon and 6 p.m. on November 5 and you'll enter oyster heaven.

Marlene Varnam, coordinator, said entertainment had once been considered. "We talked about getting musicians in, but there's just not enough space," she said.

More valuable use for that space around the church is to accommodate the big barrels where oysters are roasted over oak wood and long tables where oyster eaters stand to shuck these delicacies. There are also picnic tables for those who must sit to enjoy their meal.

Another frill dispensed with is any side dishes other than the required hush puppies and cold beverages, confined to soft drinks and iced tea. "Our church women make

the hush puppies, the men roast the oysters and the young people do the serving," Varnam explained.

Despite the lack of entertainment, arts and crafts and endless varieties of food, the crowds descend on this feast every year. According to Varnam, between 500 and 700 were fed at last year's roast.

An effective fund-raiser for the church, with plates priced at \$12 for adults and \$4 for children, the roast began as a special time of fellowship for members of the congregation.

"We just started getting together for a roast every year to visit with friends and family," Varnam related. "Then, people outside the church said if they'd known about

it they'd like to come, too, so we finally opened it up to the community. Now it's our only fundraiser. We usually make \$2,500 to \$3,000 on it and that's been used for a building fund or a parsonage fund or some other need."

This annual oyster-eating frenzy has remained a social time for visiting, as well as enjoying the favorite bi-valve. Varnam said that among the volunteers who do the work are many outside the congregation. "There's one ole fellow who's always come from Salisbury to help us and he just got married, so he's going to move to the county now," Varnam said. That brings another volunteer into the ranks of those who run one of the county's oldest and most delicious traditions.

Brochure Describes State Oyster Population Status

A new six-page brochure published by N.C. Sea Grant describes North Carolina's plummeting oyster harvest and the issues under scrutiny.

"The withering oyster industry in North Carolina is a complex problem without easy remedies," said Sea Grant spokesman Carla Burgess. "From 2 million bushels a year at the turn of the century to a feeble 50,000 annually over the past three years, the state's lagging production begs attention."

The paper outlines the results and recommendations of the N.C. Oyster Summit, coordinated by N.C. Sea Grant and the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries. As a

result of the summit, the governor appointed a blue-ribbon committee to map out a plan for boosting the state's oyster production.

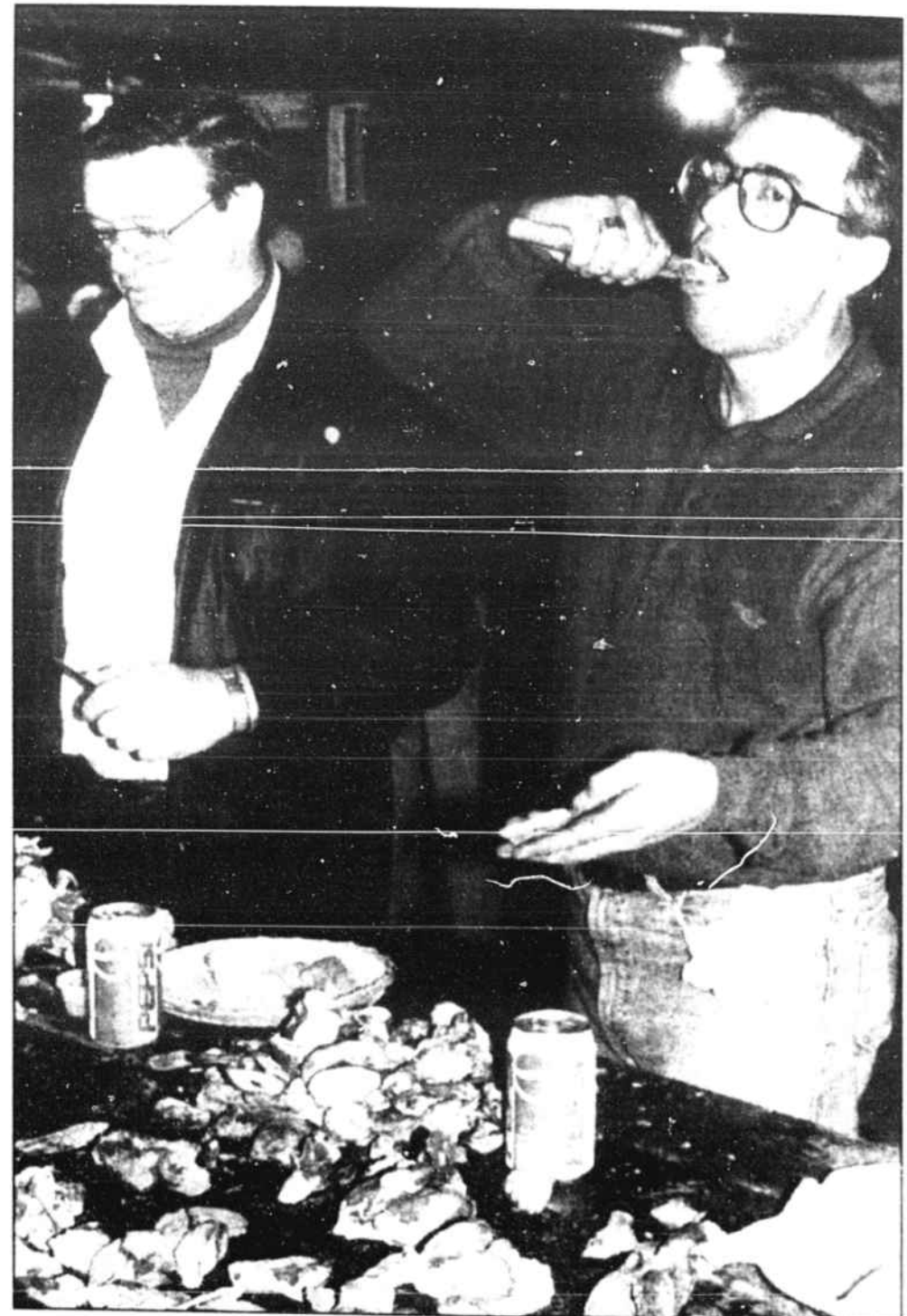
Among other issues, the committee will address oyster restoration and rehabilitation; leasing and water column access; oyster seed availability; disease research; aquaculture research; improved management; and public image and marketing.

For a free copy of the brochure, write N.C. Sea Grant, Box 8605, NCSU, Raleigh NC 27695. Ask for publication number UNC-SG-94-06: "The North Carolina Oyster Summit: Summary and Recommendations."

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THEY COME FROM near and far to down the roasted oysters at Dixon Chapel's big oyster roast. Ken Spencer of Lumberton, left, joins Phil Cheers of Shallotte in savoring the feast at last year's event.

Six-Pack Rings Pose Serious Health Risk To Aquatic Wildlife

Since its beginning in 1987, the First Citizens Big Sweep has been warning the public that six-pack rings can be hazardous to the health of wildlife.

Entanglement in one of the con-fining loops of a ring can mean a slow death for a duck, beaver or any other aquatic animal.


"We ask people not to throw the rings overboard while boating or fishing or leave them behind after parties or picnics along our inland or ocean shorelines," says Big Sweep Executive Director Susan Bartholomew. "The problem is not the six-pack ring itself. It's the peo-

ple who carelessly litter with it."

The First Citizens Bank Big Sweep, the nation's largest waterway litter cleanup, is held the third Saturday every September. (See *Calendar of Events for local contacts*.) Last year's cleanup attracted 12,000 volunteers who bagged 232 tons of debris. As always, six-pack rings were among the items collected.

"The good news is we're collecting fewer rings every year," Bartholomew says. "We feel like people are getting the message that the rings can be harmful to wildlife."

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