

# CROSSROADS

BRANDYWINE & RED CLAY SCHOOL DISTRICTS & NEARBY COMMUNITIES

## The sea will provide

A demanding, all-consuming  
way of life on and around  
Delaware Bay

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crew member 'waterwoman'

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is also a way of learning

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# Oceangoing way of life

Century-old schooner Maggie S. Myers still plies the seas

## PROFILE



**Frank "Thumper" Eicherly IV**

**AGE:** 44

**POSITION:** Captain of the Maggie S. Myers

**FAMILY:** Wife, Jean Friend

**RESIDENCE:** Bowers Beach

**BACKGROUND:** He's a first-generation waterman and lives in

Bowers Beach with his wife, Jean. Thumper also owns a small boat, the Henrietta. He has other boats. One sank in the Indian River Inlet in the mid-'80s; another was sunk right next to the Maggie at the dock when it was hit by ice.

Articles by Carol Child, special to The News Journal. News Journal photographs by Gary Emeigh.

four generations. It puts stress on married life."

Eicherly and his crew practice and teach horseshoe-crab conservation in an effort to ensure their future livelihood. On June 5 they will demonstrate what they do at the Horseshoe Crab Festival in Bowers Beach, sponsored by the Maggie S. Myers.

### Up before the sun

"The present can be as uncertain as the future. We get waves coming over, sometimes 6 to 8 feet," said Eicherly. "We try to circumvent those kinds of waves, slow down, don't go

out in bad weather; times you get caught. Despite the danger, rather die at sea than he said.

Earlier this mon

**A** waterman rests his back on a dock pile, silhouetted against the big orange sun slipping low among the reeds upriver. A salt breeze casts the surface of the Murderkill River into a net of ochre and silver ripples.

Quietly but swiftly two conch-dredging boats come up from the Delaware Bay to Bowers Beach, coming to the wide mouth of the Murderkill. One is tall, narrow and dark, a Virginia boat, maybe 40 years old, ready to roll on the swells like a cork.

The other is low, wide and white, gliding like a gossamer to dock. She is the Maggie S. Myers, a 112-year-old, 50-foot, wooden dredge schooner. Built in 1892, she has not been out of commission since 1893 when she received her commissioning pennant.

"Once we had 13 pumps going to keep her afloat while we were working," said her captain, Frank "Thumper" Eicherly IV. "She had holes the size of golf balls. It took a hundred fishing trips to get the down payment ... for repairs."

A first-generation waterman, Eicherly, 44, said the Maggie S. Myers works to pay her way.

In addition to harvesting conch, the Maggie S. Myers crew tags horseshoe crabs for the U.S. government and private research. In 2003 the crew — Eicherly and Traci Parsons, 39; Sam Marple, 28; and Shawn Gergich, 22 — tagged 10,000 crabs.

The life of a waterman is uncertain, Eicherly said, as he and the crew unloaded their bags of conchs onto trucks waiting to take them to market.

"These fishermen may not be here in 10 years," he said. "Regulations are tighter for horseshoe crabs. These families have been watermen two to



Harvested conch shells cover the chimney at the Bowers Beach home of Frank "Thumper" Eicherly IV and Jean Friend.

## FYI

### Horseshoe Crab Festival

Every year the Maggie S. Myers sponsors an educational and fun Horseshoe Crab Festival in the park at Bowers Beach. The festival is to be held this year on June 5 with T-shirt sales, a live band, and free food. Jean Friend organizes the event.

For more information on horseshoe crabs, shorebirds, and the Delaware Bay, visit [www.dnrec.state.de.us](http://www.dnrec.state.de.us).



# going f life

Maggie S. Myers  
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## PROFILE



Bowers Beach with his wife. Thumper also owns a smaller boat, the Henrietta. He has owned other boats. One sank in the Indian River Inlet in the mid-'80s; another was sitting right next to the Maggie S. Myers at the dock when it was crushed by ice.

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out in bad weather, but sometimes you get caught."

Despite the danger, "I'd rather die at sea than at dock," he said.

Earlier this month Univer-



Crew members Shawn Gergich (left) and Sam Marple lift a load of conchs from the Maggie S. Myers to a wa-



After a day on the water, the Maggie S. Myers, commissioned in 1893, heads for home.

sity of Delaware students Sarah Archbald and Kate Sims filmed the Maggie S. Myers' crew at work.

"Sarah and I got up at 3:30 a.m. and drove the hour [from Newark] to Bowers Beach,"

said Sims. "The boat left around 5 a.m. The morning was cold, and it was still dark. Thumper and his crew were running around getting things prepared for the day."

"Sarah and I ... watched the

sunrise from the windows [of the cabin] as the cool air blew through. The crew had to [weld] some of their equipment before they could start dredging. The sparks were flying ... [lighting] their faces," she said.

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## ABOUT THE BOAT

### Maggie Myers

The 24.62-gross ton Maggie Myers was built in Bridgeton, N.J. Her commissioning pennant is at the John DuBois Maritime Mu-

seum, Greenwich, N.J. Commissioned in 1893, she was built as a two-masted dredge schooner. In the 1950s, the Seacoast Oyster Co. motorized her.

"As the crew started to work we filmed, and even helped them sort through the catch."

The 20-year-old juniors wanted to study the relationship of the watermen to their environment as part of a research project for their geography class, environmental videography.

"I have a great respect for the life they have chosen to lead," Archibald said. "They work very hard and love what they do. We were lucky enough to have beautiful weather. I

can't imagine a 13-hour day of wind and sleet."

"There is a constant interaction between the family of Thumper and his crew, as there is between all the boats on the water ... through the radio. They stick close together, and if one of them were in trouble the others would be there to help," Sims said.

Eicherly and his wife, Jean Friend, bought the Maggie S. Myers about six years ago to use as a pleasure boat.

"Well, that's not true any-

more," Eicherly laughed. This year repairs will run \$50,000. She needs new ribs.

"She began as a two-masted oyster schooner," Eicherly said. "You can see the stumps where the masts were cut off when she was motorized."

Why buy an old, wooden boat whose hull resembles a dredge net?

"It looks so cool," he said. "It's low to the water, because the original dredges were operated by hand. She turns on a song, like a snow goose flying around in the air."

She also can carry her net weight in oysters - 22 tons.

"It's all about the schooner. The Maggie S. Myers Restoration Project - a nonprofit organization," said Eicherly. "You do it for a sense of gratitude, each plank, wooden plug, the integrity of the boat. It's a labor of love."

# Neighbors

## She relies on brains, not just brawn

By CAROL CHILD

Special to The News Journal

"You're only as good as your crew," said Jean Friend of Bowers Beach, wife of Frank "Thumper" Eicherly IV, captain of the Maggie S. Myers dredge schooner. "When they are wet, you give them dry clothes; when they are hungry, you feed them; when they are thirsty, you give them something to drink."

Traci Parsons, 39, is a member of the Maggie S. Myers crew. She is a woman waterman, one of three of whom she knows who work out of Bowers Beach.

Parsons does not want to be called a waterwoman. "Part of man is woman," she said. "I'm out there all day with the guys. To be called a waterman helps me to fit in."

Being a waterman is more than being a fisherman. Parsons can catch fish on a line, throw pots or dredge for shellfish. She also catches toadfish, often called oyster crackers.

"The Chinese love them," she says. "We catch toadfish and sell them to a ... man who comes down from New York to buy them."

Parsons, who has been a waterman for 15 years and on the Maggie S. Myers one year, tried office work and other things. "I don't like office work or factory work," she said. "I don't like being inside and not seeing what the day is like."

Parsons' former husband, an anchor fisherman, couldn't go to work one day, so she went out in his place. From that day for-



The News Journal/GARY EMEIGH

Traci Parsons is adamant she is a waterman, not a waterwoman.

ward she was a waterman. She was taught dredge fishing by the late Roland Macklin, who also taught Eicherly.

Parsons has been around boats and has fished all her life. In St. Louis, where she grew up, her parents and grandparents owned pleasure boats.

"Being a waterman is hard,

physical work," Parsons said. "It requires a lot of stamina. I'll probably get in trouble by saying this, but a woman can work longer than a man; she uses brains rather than brawn."

"You learn to distinguish where the fish are," said Parsons.

Each full dredge bag weighs

### PROFILE

#### Traci Parsons

AGE: 39

RESIDENCE: Bowers Beach

BACKGROUND: Has been a waterman for 15 years, and a Maggie S. Myers crew member for one year.

QUOTE: "The sun rises different every day. Even if the wind is blowing 100 mph, it's still fun."

about 200 pounds. The dredges are light hydraulic. When they bring the bags up from the water, Parsons and her fellow crew members sort the 200 pounds of dredged shellfish into 65- to 80-pound bags to go onto waiting trucks.

"Working alongside Traci and Sam gave me an appreciation for how hard these people work," said Kate Sims, a University of Delaware environmental videography student who went out March 8 on the Maggie S. Myers as part of a geography class project. "They go out with the sunrise and come home with the sunset."

Parsons, whose home overlooks the water at Bowers Beach, said "I will not eat a summer crab. They taste like bait. When the water is cold, the shellfish bury themselves in the sand, so they have to be dredged. The dredged [blue crabs] are much fatter and sweeter than crabs swimming around in warm water and caught by pot."

Parsons worked out a deal for

### In Brief

#### Certified lifeguarding class being offered

Progressive Pool Management Inc. is sponsoring an American Red Cross-certified lifeguarding course, which includes CPR and first-aid training. The classes are taught by certified instructors, and a total of 30 hours must be logged. Students must be 15 or older before course completion and must be able to pass a swim test.

This month's classes begin today and continue on Tuesday and April 8 and 13 from 6-9 p.m.

### SEND US YOUR NEWS

Send news for Neighbors 10 days prior to publication date to:

■ Mail: Box 15505  
Wilmington DE 19850  
■ Phone: 324-2826  
■ TTD: 324-2580

■ Fax: 324-2865  
■ In person: 950 W. Basin Road  
New Castle DE 19720

at the Progressive Pool Management office, 1810 Philadelphia Pike, Claymont, and Sunday and April 11 and 18 from noon-5 p.m. at the William Hicks Anderson Community Center, 501 N. Madison St., Wilmington.

May classes run May 11, 13-14, 18, and 20-21 from 6 to 9 p.m. at Progressive Pool and May 9, 16 and 23 from noon to 5 p.m. at

the community center.

The water hours of the classes are at the community center.

The course is \$175 and includes training materials, written exam and certification cards. Bring a bathing suit, towels, a beverage and a snack, writing tools and paper for notes.

To register, call 798-5144.

#### Gospel playwrights nominated for award

Helena Creamer and Michael and Barbara Way of the Cathedral of Fresh Fire Inc. in Wilmington have been nominated in the gospel playwright category at the Hollywood Insider's Gospel Music Awards for their original stage production "The Blood."

Created by the Rev. Emma Creamer, pastor and founder of the church, "The Blood" played at the Grand Opera House last summer and will return in July.

### People



# Neighbors

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Parsons worked out a deal for

her boyfriend to do the cooking. She is giving him "practice fish" to clean. Once he masters those, he can work up to cleaning flounder, she said.

In April and May Parsons will help with the U.S. Geological Survey's horseshoe-crab indexing on board the Maggie S. Myers. "Every few days during the season, a couple people from the agency go out on the boat. It is so educational," she said. "You learn a lot. For instance, I never knew there are hermaphrodite horseshoe crabs. I have a book that says once there were so many horseshoe crabs they were used for fertilizer."

Once the survey is out of the way, Eicherly and Parsons will be at the June 3-5 Horseshoe Crab and Delaware Bay seminar at the Mallard Lodge in Smyrna. They will demonstrate how to make bait wells that conserve horseshoe crabs. They will show how to put the pot over and how to bring it in.

Parsons also will be at Bowers Beach with her crew mates June 5 for the Horseshoe Crab Festival, sponsored annually by the Maggie S. Myers and organized by Jean Friend.

"I suppose there really isn't a better place to spend the day," said Sims. "Being on the water was really an encompassing feeling. To be out there every day like these people would have a profound effect on someone."

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#### Newark man cited for work at Rowan

Ed Ziegler of Newark recently earned several awards for his work as marketing director at Rowan University in Glassboro, N.J. He received three awards from the New Jersey Chapter of the International Association of Business Communicators: an award of excellence for his annual president's report, an award of merit for his total advertising campaign and an award of merit for the university's Web site.

# ool Report

Christine Lisowski, Jenna Lorenzoni, Stacey Mlynarski, Jake Riley, Ally Samluk, Kristina Samson, Danielle Skipski, Brittany Sobieski, Shannon Sowden, Krista Sund, Brian Wismer and Ryan Wolfe. Faculty members Kathleen Pusecker, business and technology chair; Maria Giorgi, math; Dana DelleDonne, social studies; and Joanne Gibbons, guidance counselor, assisted in coordinating the day.

The junior and senior classes participated in a blood drive on March 25 in Grant Hall. Peer tutoring moderator Frank Bellamo coordinated the event.

The drama class, moderated by English teacher Robin Hayden, taped a recording at the diocesan studio of the "Passion of Christ." The tape will air on radio station WDEL 1150 AM's Catholic Forum on Sunday at 10:05 a.m.

Student of the week is junior Brigdet McGinnis, All-State Chorus member and cantor for the Junior Ring Mass. Maroon & gold athlete is senior Jillian Murphy, who has participated in three sports for four years.

Third-quarter report cards were distributed on Tuesday.

Philip Pieri

## St. Mark's

The Science Olympiad teams competed at Delaware State University in Dover on March 13. The teams placed fourth and seventh in the state and received a total of 67 medals. Team coaches include Laura Mattick and Lori Mitchell of the science department, parents Joan Barber and Ardaspal Sethi, and parents of alumni Dennis Swartzfager and Mike Woodward.

Eighteen students from Theodor-Heuss-Gymnasium arrived March 18 as part of the German exchange student program.

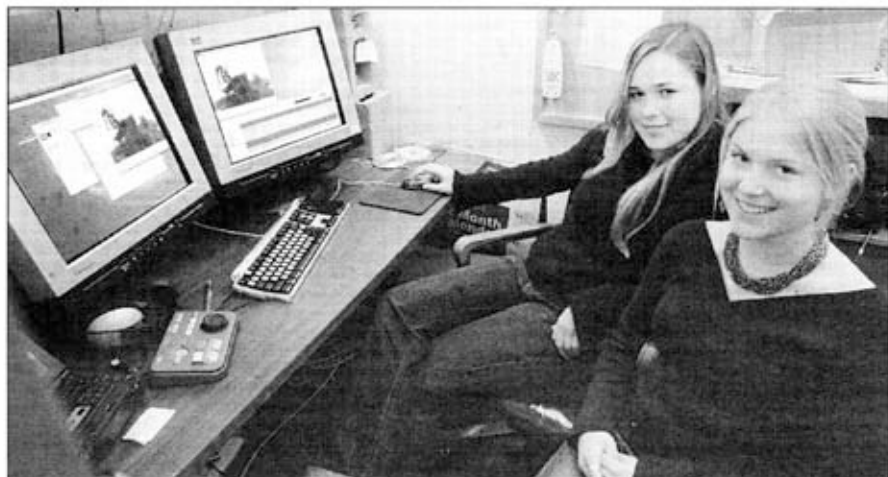
Law Club, Mock Trial and Amnesty International members will travel to the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia on Monday.

Students will be dismissed at 1:48 p.m. on Tuesday and Wednesday. Easter vacation begins after dismissal Wednesday. Classes will resume on April 19.

The freshman, junior varsity and varsity cheerleaders won first place in the Delaware State Cheerleading Competition at the University of Delaware's Bob Carpenter Center on March 7. Junior varsity and varsity captains are sophomore Amanda Rizzo and juniors Kelly Smith and Kelly Radulski, junior varsity; and seniors Lauren Degliobizzi, Erin McHugh and Ashley Nutter, varsity.

Liz Ryan

Continued on next page



The News Journal/WILLIAM BRETZGER

Kate Sims (left) and Sarah Archbald are University of Delaware juniors who worked independently on a research project about the crew of the Maggie S. Myers for their course in human geography.

# Way of life, way of learning

## Human geography examines people's ties to land and sea

By CAROL CHILD

Special to The News Journal

Students of Michael Oates' environmental videography course, Geography 467, at the University of Delaware in Newark learn to produce a TV show through studying production and editing techniques and to become objective documentarians through learning to critically analyze issues and objectively speak to people.

Oates, an independent documentary filmmaker and producer of the Emmy-nominated "Dollars on the Beach," a 1999 PBS documentary on horseshoe crabs and shore birds, was recruited by the UD geography department to teach a human geography course. Human geography explores how people live on the land.

Oates, an adjunct assistant professor, began teaching the environmental videography course last fall, working with students to frame environmental issues in and around Delaware using video. On March 16 Oates presented his course at the Association of American Geographers 100th Anniversary Conference in Philadelphia.

"Geography encompasses more subject matter than most people assume," said Kate Sims, 20, a UD junior from Newark. "It is not just maps and topography. It includes people and their interaction with the Earth."

Sims, along with classmate Sarah Archbald, observed firsthand some of that interaction as part of a research project for the class. The two spent March 8 on the water with the crew of the Maggie S. Myers, a 112-year-old, 50-foot, wooden dredge schooner

that harvests conch and tags horseshoe crabs. The boat and its crew, headed by Frank "Thumper" Eicherly IV, operate out of Bowers Beach.

"For me, this documentary is about just that," said Sims, a geography major in the process of adding art as a second major. "Thumper makes his living off of the Earth. He must think in terms of a different landscape than most; he envisions what exists under the water. He must know where the catch is, and he can make assumptions based on the underwater topography."

"I am involved in this class because of the videos we make, but the subject matter sticks to a variety of the relationships that occur in the environment, and that is what makes it intriguing to me."

"Kate and I work independently under our fabulous instructor, Mike Oates," said Sarah Archbald, 20, of Newark, a UD junior with an undeclared major. "The project is a profile on Thumper, [his wife, Jean Friend] and crew, and the watermen's way of life. Not many people rely on their natural habitat and are so closely connected to it. Mike likes to call them the last hunter/gatherers."

"Sarah and I took the class last semester as a 300-level class," said Sims. "We are working independently. ... Everything we do allows us an opportunity to gain further understanding of the camera, sound, and editing system."

"The students work with self-starter projects," said Oates. "Last fall Sarah studied people who raise chickens. She went to poultry farms, conducted interviews in the field and camped out in hen houses."

Now Archbald and Sims are editing a piece for UD professor of human geography April Veness for a geographers conference. Archbald and Sims were given the footage and are completing the producing and editing.

The two soon will be back on the water to gather additional footage. Beginning April 12 and for eight days over the course of four to five weeks Archbald, Sims and the Maggie S. Myers crew will work in Delaware Bay with scientists and other watermen to index horseshoe crabs for a U.S. Geological Survey program headed by biological statistician Dave Smith. Crabs are tagged and measured and their age and sex determined. Archbald and Sims will document their experience on video.

Last year, according to Oates, 17,000 crabs were tagged - 10,000 on the Maggie S. Myers. "Documentation must be made in numbers rigorous enough to stand up in court," Oates said. This year will be the first year radio transmitters are attached. The survey will culminate in the Horseshoe Crab Festival, June 5, at Bowers Beach.

"We have been looking at the horseshoe crab phenomenon in the bay since 1986," said Oates.

Through the "Green Eggs in the Sand" project, Oates and a group of scientists, watermen, birders and educators have developed a national curriculum to teach middle-school students about the horseshoe crab in the Delaware Bay. They use Oates' "Dollars on the Beach" as a teaching tool.

"The original video documentary," said Oates, "has expanded from 100 minutes of TV to 17 segments."