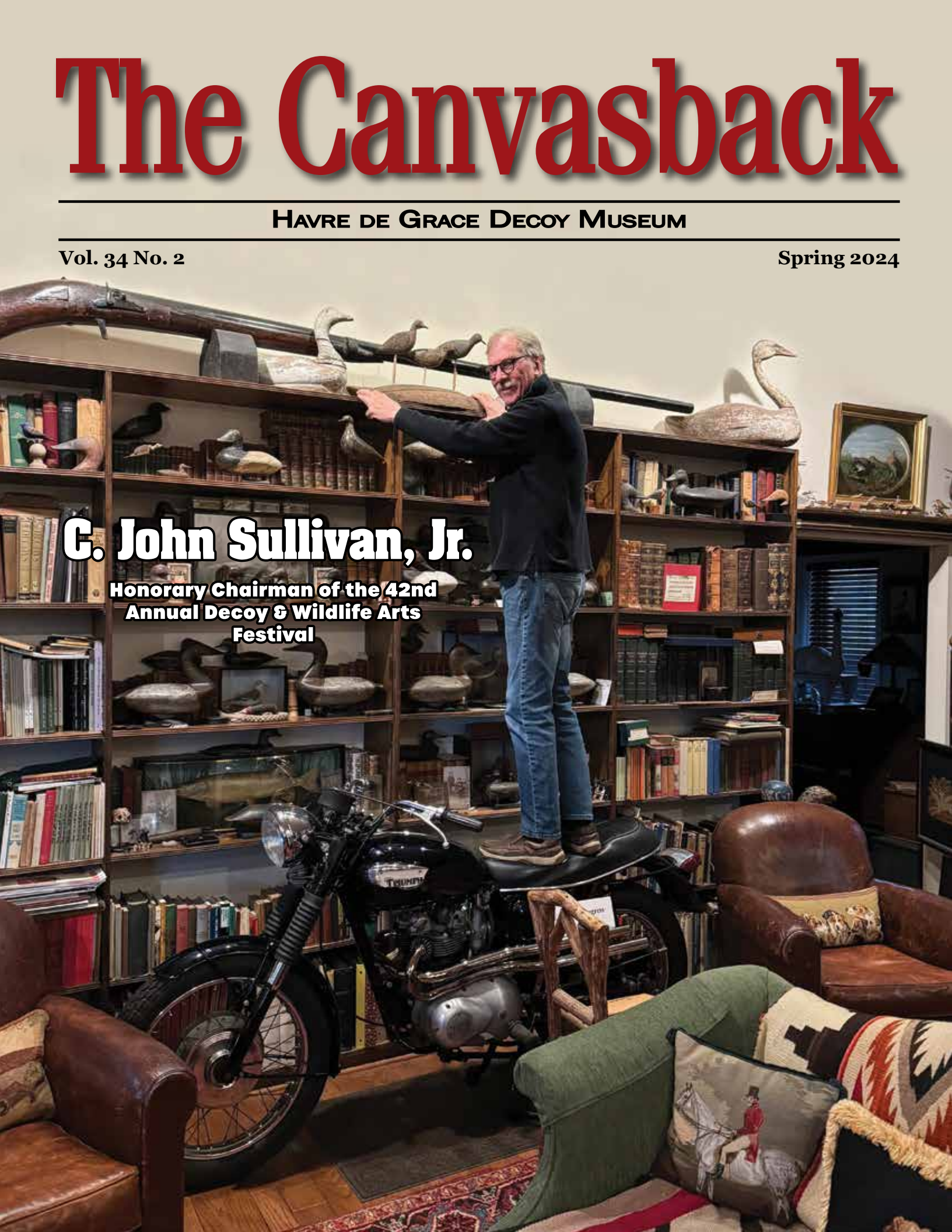


The Canvasback

HAVRE DE GRACE DECOY MUSEUM

Vol. 34 No. 2

Spring 2024



C. John Sullivan, Jr.

**Honorary Chairman of the 42nd
Annual Decoy & Wildlife Arts
Festival**



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can•vas•back

(kan'ves bak'), n.,pl. -backs, (esp. collectively) — back.

1. a north american wild duck, the male of which has a whitish back and a reddish-brown head and neck.
2. a style of decoy made famous by carvers of the Susquehanna Flats region.
3. a quarterly publication of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum.

THE MUSEUM WAS INCORPORATED IN 1981 AS A 501(c)(3) TAX-EXEMPT ORGANIZATION TO COLLECT, DOCUMENT, PRESERVE, AND INTERPRET WATERFOWL DECOYS AS A UNIQUE FORM OF FOLK ART.

FUNDED IN PART BY



The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum is supported in part by the Maryland State Arts Council (msac.org)



Contents

Features

- 7 Havre de Grace Decoy Museum/Delta Waterfowl Partnership
- 11 The Havre de Grace Rig
- 15 Influences of African Americans on Decoy Making Exhibit
- 19 C. John Sullivan, Jr. - Honorary Chairman of the 42nd Annual Decoy & Wildlife Arts Festival
- 30 Workshop Window - *Jimmy Bowden*
- 32 Canvasback Naturalist - *Redhead Duck*
- 36 Shots from the Wild
- 40 Decoy Club News

ON THE COVER

C. John Sullivan, Jr. stands on top of his 1971 Triumph to adjust a shorebird display. He is surrounded by the “stuff” he admires. There is a classic punt gun that he first saw pictured in *The Outlaw Gunner*. Near the gun rests a porch post swan decoy and a Harry Emmords swan. Dye/Graham ruddy ducks and C. N. Barnard high-head canvasback hens are close by. Adjacent to the decoys are dozens of books from his library intermingled with artifacts and various objects collected throughout his lifetime.

Departments

- 3 From the President
- 6 Museum Members

Susquehanna Flats Marine Exhibition™

In Conjunction with the 42nd Annual Decoy & Wildlife Arts Festival
Hosted by: The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum

Saturday, May 4 & Sunday, May 5, 2024

10:00 AM - 4:00 PM Saturday • 10:00 AM - 3:00 PM Sunday
STAR Centre • 700 Congress Avenue • Havre de Grace, MD



**Marine Exhibition Admission is FREE • Decoy Festival Admission is \$10
Come experience both events**

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From the President...

We have made it through another winter season and have our eyes firmly affixed on the upcoming 42nd Annual Havre de Grace Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival. This year's event will again be held at the STAR Centre in Havre de Grace and will take place on May 4 & 5, 2024. We are proud to have local historian C. John Sullivan, Jr. serve as this year's Honorary Chairman. John Sullivan has been a valuable asset to the Decoy Museum for many years and continues to provide guidance for our Collections Committee and curatorial staff. A Carvers Reception will be held on Friday evening starting at 6:00 PM to greet C. John Sullivan, Jr. in the Carvers gallery at the Decoy Museum. The event is free and open to all members and guests.



As I mentioned in my message in the Winter edition of the Canvasback, 2024 will be another ambitious year for the Decoy Museum. Progress continues on our effort to preserve the R. Madison Mitchell Decoy Shop and adding additional exhibit space by means of an expansion to the current museum building. We have developed a master plan and are working with our architect (ADW Associates) to develop a cost estimate. The next step will be to develop fundraising collateral and kick off a campaign to fund the project. Although we do not have a cost estimate at this time, the proposed expansion promises to be the most expensive project in the museum's 38-year history.

In February, we relocated the reference book library from the second floor of the museum to the Board Room in the basement to make way for additional exhibit space. The Board Room affords a suitable environment for those wishing to use our publications for their research or casual reading. A new custom built exhibit case has been installed in place of the reference books and provides much needed exhibit space which will allow the museum to take advantage of temporary exhibit opportunities which have been more frequent over the last year or so. The Collections Committee is currently evaluating opportunities to showcase in this new exhibit space.

The MHAA funded "Influences of African Americans on Decoy Making" exhibit is being created with the very ambitious goal of being ready for the May Decoy Festival. A custom exhibit case has been ordered as has a 43" electronic touchscreen for visitors to interact with as they learn about the lives and histories of known Black decoy carvers from our region. The creative content for the touchscreen is near completion. Although a significant amount has been completed for this exhibit, a good deal of work remains in order to meet our goal.

After nearly fifteen years serving as the Museum's Treasurer, Ralph Hockman has decided to step down in June in order to fully enjoy time with his wife Pat and family. Ralph has been an active Board member throughout his tenure and has provided sound financial advice which has enabled the museum to manage itself responsibly. Ralph will continue to volunteer on selected projects. The Museum has not identified a replacement for Ralph and is actively evaluating our options for this critical position. Ralph, we thank you for your dedication and leadership throughout your years of service.

HAVRE DE GRACE • MARYLAND

42ND ANNUAL

Decoy & Wildlife
Arts Festival

May 4 & 5, 2024

STAR Centre

700 Congress Avenue, Havre de Grace, MD 21078

Saturday, May 4 • 9 AM – 5 PM

Sunday, May 5 • 9 AM – 3 PM

Honorary Chairman:
C. John Sullivan, Jr.



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FESTIVAL INFORMATION

Friday, May 3

Exhibitor Set-up

1:00 PM – 4:00 PM • STAR Centre

Carvers Reception

6:00 PM – 8:30 PM • Decoy Museum

Saturday, May 4

42nd Annual Decoy

& Wildlife Art Festival Exhibition

9:00 AM – 5:00 PM • STAR Centre

Decorative Carving Registration & Competition

STAR Centre (Small Gym)

Registration 9:00 AM – 10:30 AM

Judging 11:00 AM – 3:00 PM

Marine Exhibition

10:00 AM – 4:00 PM • STAR Centre

Gunning Decoy Registration & Competition

STAR Centre (Small Gym)

Registration 9:00 AM – 10:30 AM

Judging 11:00 AM – 3:00 AM

J. Evans McKinney Old Decoy Competition

STAR Centre (Small Gym)

Registration 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Judging 12:00 PM – 1:00 PM

Sunday, May 5

42nd Annual Decoy

& Wildlife Art Festival Exhibition

9:00 AM – 3:00 PM • STAR Centre

Marine Exhibition

10:00 AM – 3:00 PM • STAR Centre

Museum

Spring Raffle

Drawing

2:00 PM

STAR Centre



A note about the Honorary Chairman . . .

C. John Sullivan, Jr., a nationally recognized expert on American wooden fowl, is both an appraiser and collector of decoys, firearms, and other accoutrements used in the pursuit of waterfowl. An historian by avocation, he has spent a lifetime researching the history of waterfowling in the Chesapeake region.

John has shared his knowledge and promoted appreciation of the waterfowling tradition of Maryland and the appreciation of decoys as folk art by authoring meticulously researched books on waterfowling, drawing on gunning club journals, memoirs, and personal interviews to recreate the heyday of the sport and appreciation of the decoy art form.

Food & Beverages will be available during the weekend through our show partner, the Susquehanna Flats Chapter of Delta Waterfowl. Please visit our website www.decoymuseum.com for Festival information and updates to this schedule as we draw nearer to the event.



Museum Members

Thank you and welcome to the following members and businesses that recently renewed their membership or newly joined us. Your continued support and contributions are essential to the overall success of the Decoy Museum:

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Sidney Beddow II,
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Spring 2024

Raffle

A chance to win ONE of four valuable prizes.
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1st Prize:
\$500 Cash

2nd Prize:
**Mallard Pair by
R. Madison Mitchell, 1985**



4th Prize:
**Captain Bill Collins
Drake Redhead, 1992**



3rd Prize:
**Fall Outing (Wood Duck Print) by
Margaret Reinbold Blair**

Drawing will be held on Sunday, May 5, 2024 @ 2:00 PM in the lobby of the STAR Centre

For tickets call **410.939.3739** or email: information@DecoyMuseum.com
(Additional tickets will be available at the Museum.)

Havre de Grace Decoy Museum/ Delta Waterfowl Partnership

... body booters visit the Museum following their hunting adventures

By Mike Tarquini



The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum as well as many other Harford County non-profit organizations are the beneficiaries of tourism grant dollars originating from the hotel tax levied on guests when they visit the county. Imposed in January 2017, the tax is collected on hotel rooms in Harford County at a rate of 6%. A portion of the tax is used to fund tourism and tourism-related activities in the county and its municipalities.

In 2023, County Executive Bob Cassilly announced a new tourism funding model that awards tourism funds to individual related organizations that promote visits lasting more than one day. "Increasing overnight stays in Harford County is a key component to leveraging tourism to support Harford's economy and small businesses," Harford County Executive Bob Cassilly said. "We want our many local tourism organizations to work together to create top-notch events that will bring people to our county from all over the region." Through the Partnership Fund, Harford County provides grants to non-profit organizations who work together to plan joint or extended events that will draw visitors overnight, or even longer, and not just for the day.

The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum embraced this challenge by forming a partnership with the local Susquehanna Flats Chapter of Delta Waterfowl, a non-profit organization operating in both

Canada and the United States whose mission is to secure the future of waterfowl and waterfowl hunting. The partnership is mainly structured around the Annual Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival, a multi-day event which has been held in Havre de Grace the first weekend in May since 1982. The partnership also includes private Museum tours for guests of Delta Waterfowl who visit Harford County during the 2023 - 2024 hunting season in order to experience the tradition of "body booting" on the famed Susquehanna Flats.

The out of town guests travel to Harford County and stay in the area the night before their hunt. On the morning of the body booting endeavor, the visitors rendezvous with Captain Randy McElyea (President of the Susquehanna Flats Chapter of Delta Waterfowl) at the boat dock located at Tidewater Marina in Havre de Grace. Randy serves as their guide throughout the experience. Once the visitors have completed their time on the water, Randy notifies the Decoy Museum that they are heading back to the dock. Museum personnel prepare for their arrival. The out of town guests are treated to a private tour of the Museum where they are exposed to the rich history and cultural heritage of waterfowling and decoy making in the Lower Susquehanna River and Upper Chesapeake Bay. Each visit to the Museum lasts about two hours. Some of the guests hunt a single day while others hunt on multiple days. Regardless, the body booting trips provide opportunity for multiple night stays within Harford County.



The mystique of leaving the dock in the black of night heading for one's body booting destination. The main cabin boat tows two smaller boats loaded with decoys, stick ups, and other body booting equipment. Havre de Grace forms the backdrop as the gunning rig heads towards its destination.



South Dakotans (L to R) Tim Engalls, Eric Reisenweber, Carey England, and Brady Jatton pose for a photo following an enjoyable day of body booting on the Chesapeake Son. Delta Waterfowl host Matt Kneisley (C) is a Sr. Regional Director North East Atlantic Flyway for Delta Waterfowl



(L to R) Craig Emory (Western Shore, MD Delta Waterfowl Chapter Chairman), Adam Gingher (Co-Chairman, Mason-Dixon Delta Waterfowl Chapter), Riley Barnhill (videographer for GunDog Outdoors), Matt Kneisley (Sr. Regional Director, North East Atlantic Flyway, Delta Waterfowl), Alex Langbell (owner, GunDogs Outdoors) and Rob Nally (Chairman Mason-Dixon Chapter Delta Waterfowl) look over the "Home Run Baker" exhibit at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum

December 21, 2023

Four visitors from South Dakota visited Harford County on December 21, 2023 to join Delta Waterfowl host, Matt Kneisley (Sr. Regional Director North East Atlantic Flyway, Delta Waterfowl) for body booting aboard local charter vessel "Chesapeake Son" which operates out of Tidewater Marina in Havre de Grace, MD. As can be seen from the photo, duck shooting was good that day and the South Dakota visitors bagged their share of canvasbacks and bluebills. The South Dakota visitors and their host accounted for 10 nights in Harford County during their adventure.

December 27, 2023

On December 27, 2023 Matt Kneisley (Sr. Regional Director, North East Atlantic Flyway, Delta Waterfowl) hosted a hunting party of five visitors aboard the "Chesapeake Son". This group included Delta Waterfowl volunteers from outside our region as well as Alex Langbell, owner of GunDog Outdoors (Portland, OR). GunDog Outdoors is a company that focuses on the safety and comfort of the hunting dog. Langbell has spent the last 18 years in the hunting industry as a hunting guide, outdoor TV co-host/producer and writer. He has hunted waterfowl across North America for the last 40 years owning hunting dogs his entire life.

With his years of experience in waterfowling, Langbell has seen and witnessed injuries to dogs, some that could have been prevented. He came to realize that there was a lack of awareness and practice of gun dog safety. He soon made it his mission to educate others in the importance of practicing gun dog safety.

The group also included three hunting dogs. After a successful day of body booting, the group including the dogs visited the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum to take in all of its offerings. This group spent a total of 12 nights in Harford County as part of their experience.

January 19, 2024

The body booting trips resumed after the holidays on January 19, 2024 as a group of six hunters from Emerald Isle, NC spent a total of 18 nights in Harford County while they enjoyed some waterfowl hunting on the Susquehanna Flats. This adventure followed a different script than the other outings. The group hunted two days with a rest day in between in order to spend time at a local decoy shop and visit the Decoy Museum. After spending most of the day with local decoy carver Captain Joey Jobes, they toured the Museum. The Museum was closed on that particular day due to inclement weather, but the facility was opened to accommodate the touring group.

January 25, 2024

The final body booting group of the 2023-2024 hunting season came through the Decoy Museum on January 25, 2024. A total of four hunters hailing from Michigan, Delaware, and Canada spent a total of 16 nights in Harford County as they enjoyed multiple days of hunting on the Flats and taking in some of the attractions that the area offers.

All told, the partnership between the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum and the Susquehanna Chapter of Delta Waterfowl provided an opportunity for a total of 56 hotel nights through body booting / Museum visitation during the 2023 – 2024 waterfowl hunting season.

The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum wishes to thank the Susquehanna Flats Chapter of Delta Waterfowl for being the perfect partner as we serve to educate our visitors to Harford County about the rich cultural heritage of waterfowling and decoy making in our region, the Lower Susquehanna River and Upper Chesapeake Bay. Special thanks to Captain Randy McElyea (Captain and guide for “Chesapeake Son” & President of the local Delta Waterfowl Chapter) for his efforts to coordinate the timing of the hunting groups that visited the museum.

It goes without saying that having a multi-national organization as a partner requires the support of those beyond the local level. The Museum wishes to acknowledge Chris Williams, Director of Events, Eastern United States & Canada, Delta Waterfowl, for approving this partnership and furnishing the Decoy Museum with the required documents for our application to Harford County. Also, special thanks to Matt Kneisley, Sr. Regional Director, North East Atlantic Flyway, Delta Waterfowl, whose efforts served to coordinate the body booting trips with the visits to the Museum. The entire effort was testimony what a partnership can accomplish when focused on the mission. We look forward to working with our partners at Delta Waterfowl once again as we execute the 42nd Annual Decoy & Wildlife Arts Festival in May.

The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum wishes to thank Harford County Executive Bob Cassilly for supporting the Museum in FY2024 through the Harford County Partnership Tourism Grant.



The GunDog group (including the hunting dogs) admires the Charlie Joiner exhibit in the Carvers Gallery of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum



Members of the Emerald Isle, NC group engage with the touchscreen monitors in the “What is a Decoy” Gallery and viewed a video of Joey Jobes painting a hen pintail as Joey himself (background left) looks on



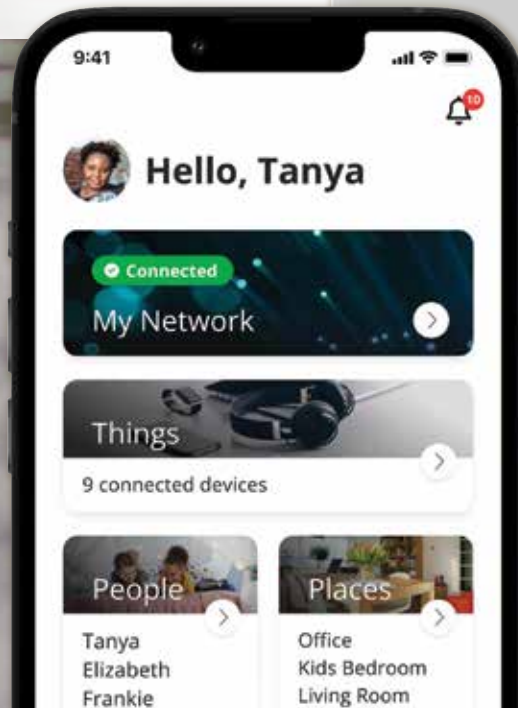
Joey Jobes (third from the left) gives the North Carolina guests a primer of what it was like growing up inside of Captain Harry Jobes’ decoy shop as they peer into Harry’s exhibit case in the Carvers Gallery

“The waiting is the hardest part” (Tom Petty). Matt Kneisley, Sr. Regional Director North East Atlantic Flyway for Delta Waterfowl, has his eye on some waterfowl working towards the decoys. Matt’s Labrador retriever Lacy sits still as the birds work their way into range.





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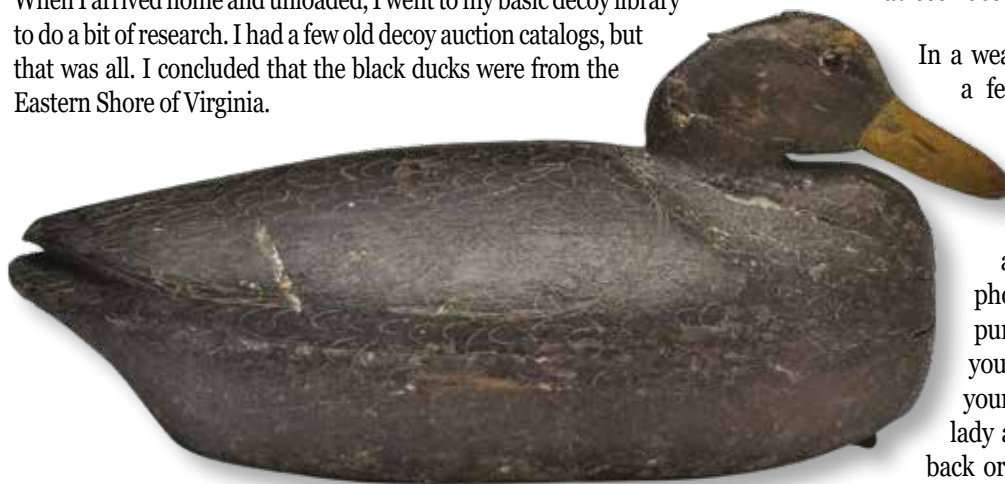
The Havre de Grace Rig, or some might say The Baltimore Rig

By C. John Sullivan, Jr.

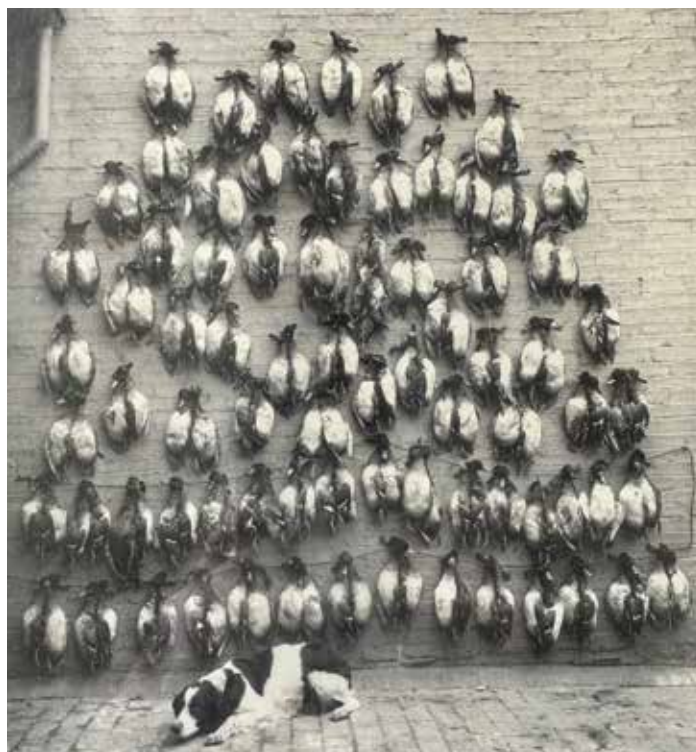
I have been collecting decoys for what seems to be a very long time. When reality takes over, I realize I have been gathering old wooden decoys around me for more years than many of today's collectors have been alive. I knew that it had been a long time when I was recently invited to a "Decoy Round Table" with a group of older collectors. I looked around the room of older collectors, and I quickly realized that I was the fifth oldest in the group. Some great stories were told, and I realized that I do bring something to the table with these older collectors.

My collecting has historically been focused on decoys from the Upper Chesapeake Bay. A few outliers have joined the collection over time. In the late 1970s, I received a phone call regarding some items being offered for sale. The call was from the widow of a gentleman from just outside the city of Havre de Grace. I visited the property and purchased a few items. There was a large group of decoys that were neatly arranged by an auctioneer and scheduled to be moved to an offsite auction site. I realized that the deceased was a long-time waterfowler from the area and that his late father-in-law, Robert Murray Vandiver, had once owned an extensive group of decoys and related waterfowling artifacts from the Susquehanna Flats. As I concluded my visit with the delightful lady, she led me from the items going to auction into a small room with empty shelves and empty gun display cases. Passing through the room, I couldn't help but notice several decoys on top of one of the empty gun display cases. I stopped and asked about the five decoys resting there. I was told that apparently the auctioneer wasn't interested in them because they weren't from the Susquehanna Flats. I took one or two of them down from their resting place and handled them. They all had the same form, the same scratch paint, and the same flat-head ballast weights, and each wore a carved letter N on its underside; they were a very dark greenish black, and most had cracks through their necks. To my eyes, they weren't the smooth, rather sleek black ducks from the Upper Chesapeake. I gently asked if they were for sale. The reply was that she would think about it and would let me know. I left her that day very happy with the few things that I purchased, including a pair of live pea fowl and a gift of a miniature Virginia pintail carved by Doug Jester, and an early photograph of bluebills hanging on the side of the Smith house on Spesutie Island.

When I arrived home and unloaded, I went to my basic decoy library to do a bit of research. I had a few old decoy auction catalogs, but that was all. I concluded that the black ducks were from the Eastern Shore of Virginia.



Nathan Cobb Jr. Black Duck



Bluebills hang on the wall of the Smith House on Spesutie Island circa 1890

The next day, I received a call that I could buy the five decoys; we then agreed on the price of one thousand dollars each. I went to the bank the next day and withdrew all of my available funds. I drove to Havre de Grace and returned with the decoys. I handled them and studied them; some wore a rather crude letter N on their underside and others a fancy letter N with serif ends. Each of the decoys was a slightly different size, the same length, but each with a different circumference. The difference in circumference made perfect sense. Some carvers salvaged shipwrecks off the Virginia barrier islands and used the ships' masts for decoy bodies. Mast poles taper as their height increases. I took photos of them resting outside of our home on a bench. I carefully arranged them according to their bodies, fattest to thinnest. I was delighted with this addition to my collection. And although the decoys were carved in Virginia, they had seen use on the Susquehanna Flats.

In a weak moment, I shared my enthusiasm with a few collectors. That decision was perhaps the biggest regret in my life of collecting. Apparently, word spread of my recent find and reached back to my source. I had the Cobbs resting comfortably on a shelf in my living room when I received a phone call from the dear lady from whom I had purchased them. The call began "John Sullivan, you know what you have done, you have used your knowledge and taken advantage of a widow lady and cancer survivor and I want my decoys back or I will ruin your reputation." I was in my early thirties and had been appointed to a responsible position in State Government. What was I to do? I quickly decided;

I met her the next day on the parking lot of a shopping center. She opened the trunk of her auto, and I transferred the decoys from my vehicle to hers. After they were in her possession, I asked if I could buy one for the price of the five, and she agreed. I selected the fattest of the group, and we parted company. Two days later, I met a major collector from the Eastern Shore and handed him the decoy, and he handed me the five thousand. It was a very sad day, and one I have never forgotten.

Over 45 years had passed when I received a phone call in the spring of 2022. I was asked by John Deeter of the Guyette and Deeter Decoy Auction Company to tell him what I knew of the Baltimore Rig of Cobb black ducks. I quickly responded “You must mean the Havre de Grace Rig.” And, so it began as I retold the story to him. I have relived it many times.

As I have looked back on that encounter with a group of decoys that I had no knowledge of, I have asked myself many times, did I make the correct decision in returning four of those decoys to their owner? I will admit that yes, I did have a bit of an advantage over the seller BUT I had never seen or much less handled a Cobb decoy before that day. I had never paid that much money for any decoy in my life. I was still buying Mitchell and Gibson decoys for eight to twelve dollars each, and perhaps if I had the chance of buying a good old Havre de Grace decoy for one or two hundred dollars, I would do it. I was taking a huge gamble on a group of decoys that I knew nothing about. By returning them, as much as it hurt, my reputation was safe, and at the end of the day, all we really take with us is our good name.

For those who know anything of my collecting, I have parted with very few pieces and I have missed and regretted every piece that has left my shelves. In a few cases, I have been able to buy back some of the things that left me many years ago. And now, one of those pieces that was mine for a very short period of time, a Nathan Cobb hollow-carved black duck with a serif carved N on its underside, has rejoined my flock.

In gathering information over those many years since I first laid eyes on those black ducks, I can now relate some interesting facts. The original owner from Havre de Grace traveled to Oyster, Virginia, for many years and gunned over the rig of Joseph Crumb and his son, Willie Crumb. The Crumbs had hired Ira Hudson to paint the Crumb rig in 1930. Hudson spent several days painting everything in the rig. A portion of those decoys had been carved by the Cobbs of Cobb Island. The gunner from Havre de Grace expressed to the Crumbs

that he was doing some black duck shooting on the Susquehanna Flats and would like to get some decoys. The Crumbs sold a group of five Nathan Cobb black duck decoys to him, and those decoys traveled back to Harford County.

The group of decoys that traveled from Cobb Island to Oyster, Virginia, to Havre de Grace scattered to other regions before one came to me. They joined the shelves of some of the best collections, those of Bill Purnell, Grayson Chesser, D. C. North, and Charlie Hunter.

On page 198 of Henry A. Fleckenstein, Jr.’s, *Southern Decoys of Virginia and the Carolinas* (published in 1983), in image number 412, a Nathan Cobb, Jr., black duck is pictured. It is one from the Havre de Grace Rig. More recently, the same exact decoy was pictured in *Wings of Wonder* by Dr. Lloyd Newbury. The decoy was sold as lot 29 at the Guyette and Deeter auction on July 29, 2022. After a long journey, this black duck now resides with a group of Upper Bay decoys in my collection.

Mitchell Motor Sales Calendar



Miniature pintail carved by Doug Jester

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Mallard hen by the Caines Brothers - Sold 2018 for \$767,000

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Influences of African Americans on Decoy Making Exhibit

... set to open at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum

By Mike Tarquini



*A crew of Black fishermen haul in a catch of menhaden near Reedville, Va. (Commonwealth Preservation Group).
Image courtesy of Virginia Mercury*

African Americans have been part of the documented history of the Chesapeake Bay region since colonial times. They worked in the traditional industries throughout the Bay region as waterman and in seafood processing. They also made equipment that supported the maritime industries that were so vital to the many Chesapeake Bay communities. As we have all come to know, hunting became an important activity in the Bay region. African Americans were proficient hunters, guides, and some even made waterfowl decoys. There is essentially no documentation of African American decoy makers west of the Chesapeake Bay in the Lower Susquehanna and Upper Chesapeake Bay region.

Maryland and Virginia's Eastern Shore is well known for its waterfowl decoy makers and they have played an important part of the socioeconomic history of the area. Given the large population of African Americans on the Delmarva Peninsula, it's surprising that there has been so little documented history of their involvement in decoy making, given their association with traditional Chesapeake Bay activities such as hunting and fishing.

William "Pied" Jones and Sherman Jones of Chrisfield, MD represent two of the documented African Americans that were known to make waterfowl decoys in the Delmarva region. Despite the fact that relatively little is known about their background and history, it is clear that they both had a variety of skills, were woodworkers, and avid hunters.



African American women picking crab meat in a seafood processing house

Sherman Jones was one of four children of Pied Jones. Much like his father, Sherman was multi-talented and was an accomplished carpenter and outdoorsman. History shows that Sherman had his own boat, from which he hunted and fished. Sherman lived in an African American enclave in an outlying area of Crisfield, MD called "Freedomtown".



Bluebill decoy crafted by William "Pied" Jones of Crisfield, MD



The Samuel and Harriet Gibson family. Douglas Gibson was #9 of 10 children



Sherman Jones (1902-1965) Sherman Jones resided in Freedomtown, a settlement near Crisfield, MD

Sherman would hunt ducks and geese when in season. He turned to upland species in the fall and spring. He was a talented trapper, catching muskrats, fox, racoons, and rabbits to supplement his income.

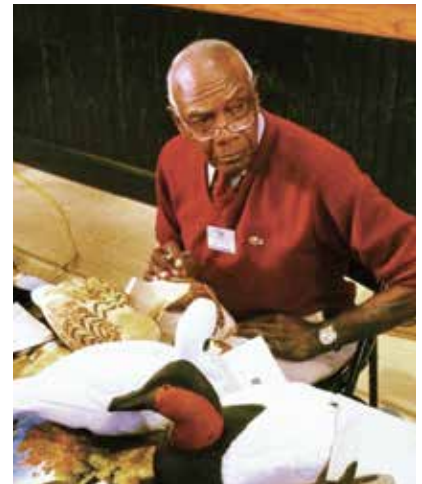
During Sherman's day, demand was strong for skins to support the fur trade.

Sherman Jones was an accomplished waterfowl decoy carver, making birds mostly for his own use, but was thought to give some to family and friends. Unlike his father, he engaged his carving talents in a variety of folk motifs. He made waterfowl, shorebirds, and some upland species such as quail. Sherman's talent for producing "folk art" style decoys led to his working relationship with fellow Crisfield carver Lloyd Tyler.

It is also known that African American Doug Gibson (Milford, DE) crafted waterfowl decoys as did his father Samuel Gibson (Trappe, MD).

Doug Gibson was born as the ninth of ten children to Samuel and Harriet Gibson in Trappe, MD (Talbot County) on February 28, 1923. Doug attended an all-black elementary school in Trappe where the students had to use old, tattered text books and were taught by black teachers. He said, "blacks did not feel neglected at that time, for that's all they knew."

Douglas Gibson exhibits his work at a regional decoy show



When Doug was 7 years old, Samuel and Harriet moved their family from Trappe to a farm, owned by Billy Meyers, near Oxford, MD (Talbot County). Samuel, Harriet, and the children worked that farm as sharecroppers for many years.

In 1942 with the world at war (WWII), Doug at age 19 traveled to Baltimore, met with a recruiter, and enlisted in the United States Navy. Doug was stationed at Pearl Harbor, HI for the next four years (1942-1946). Once discharged from his service obligations, Doug used his GI Bill benefits to continue his college studies at Delaware State College, originally founded in 1891 as Delaware College for Colored Students. During his time at Delaware State (1946-1950), Doug pursued a bachelor's degree in industrial arts. Following his time at Delaware State College, Doug decided to pursue a master's degree in education at the University of Delaware. He earned his masters in 1952, landed some interim teaching jobs, ultimately ending up at Delaware Technical College where he taught industrial arts. Doug retired from Del Tech after teaching there for 20 years in 1988.

In 1970, Doug embarked on his waterfowl decoy carving career. He would shape his decoy bodies and heads using a band saw. He would then refine them with hand tools. Doug's wife Dorothy gifted him a Fordham tool and the following Christmas, his son Darrald gifted him a Dremel tool. Both of these tools enabled Doug to carve his decoys in a more efficient way. Doug became



James Johnson (Temperanceville, VA)

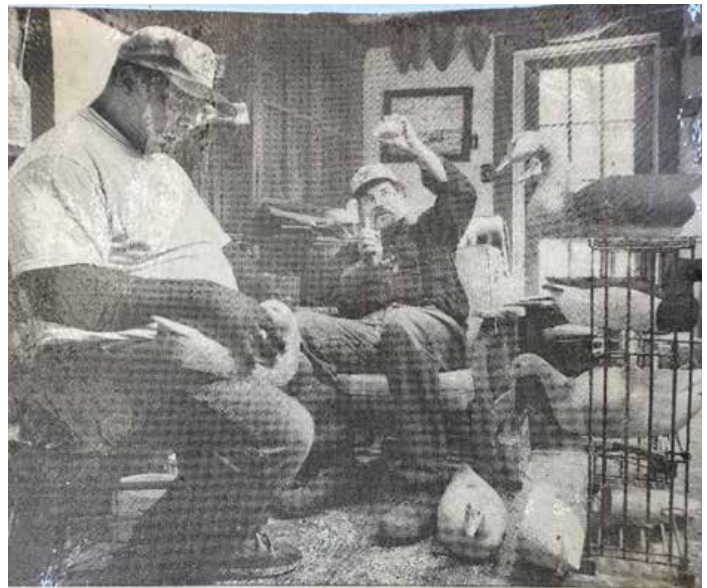
obsessed with his carvings to the extent that with every carving he made, he wanted to make another. He made both full-size and miniature decoy carvings.

Like Maryland's eastern shore, the eastern shore of Virginia has had very few documented African American decoy makers. Other than Pied and Sherman Jones (Crisfield, MD), Samuel and Doug Gibson (Trappe, MD), the Delmarva peninsula has produced only one other known Black decoy maker, James Johnson.

James Johnson was born in 1948 on Virginia's eastern shore in Messongo, an unincorporated community in Accomack County. James' family worked in the seafood business with a focus on oyster shucking for H.V. Drewer Seafood (Saxis, VA), one of the Delmarva peninsula's major processing and packing houses.

James Johnson now lives in Temperanceville, VA (less than 10 miles from his birthplace). James married his wife, Joanne, whom he met in elementary school and raised three children. James and Joanne were married for 48 years, until she passed in 2016.

James studied carpentry at Norfolk State University. He returned to Accomack County after college and took up work as a carpenter. Aside from carpentry, James worked in law enforcement and drove a school bus for over 20 years. Things changed for James in 2007.



James Johnson (L) carves decoys alongside his mentor Grayson Chesser (R)

Joanne worked for Holden Creek Gun Club, a nearby hunting lodge in Sanford, VA owned and operated by non-other than master decoy carver Grayson Chesser and his wife Dawn.

Grayson asked Joanne if James would have any interest in helping him around his decoy shop. James' training as a carpenter and woodworker made him a natural to help out Grayson Chesser. James agreed and asked Grayson to teach him how to carve. James began working for Grayson in 2002. Grayson took James under his wing and taught him the folk art of crafting decoys.

Chesser states "it's a pleasure to watch him. He truly loves it. He doesn't do it just for the money. For him I think it's a form of expression, which is what it should be."

Research reveals that African Americans were much more prominent in the decoy making history of the Louisiana region than they were in the Chesapeake Bay. Reliable sources have uncovered over twenty documented black decoy makers in the Louisiana area. All but two are deceased. Mitchell LaFrance (deceased) is considered the patriarch of black decoy makers in that region. Dionell Johnson (Poydras, LA) and Eric Hutchison (New Orleans, LA) continue the practice of decoy making in Louisiana.

Funded by a Maryland Heritage Areas Authority grant, the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum will open a permanent exhibit on African American Influences on Decoy Making in the spring of 2024. Be sure to visit the museum and interact with touchscreens to immerse yourself in this seldom told story. An exhibit of decoys and other artifacts will accompany the electronic presentations showcasing the work of each of the known Black decoy makers from our region.



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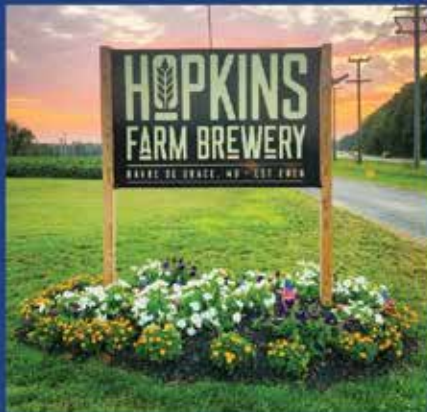
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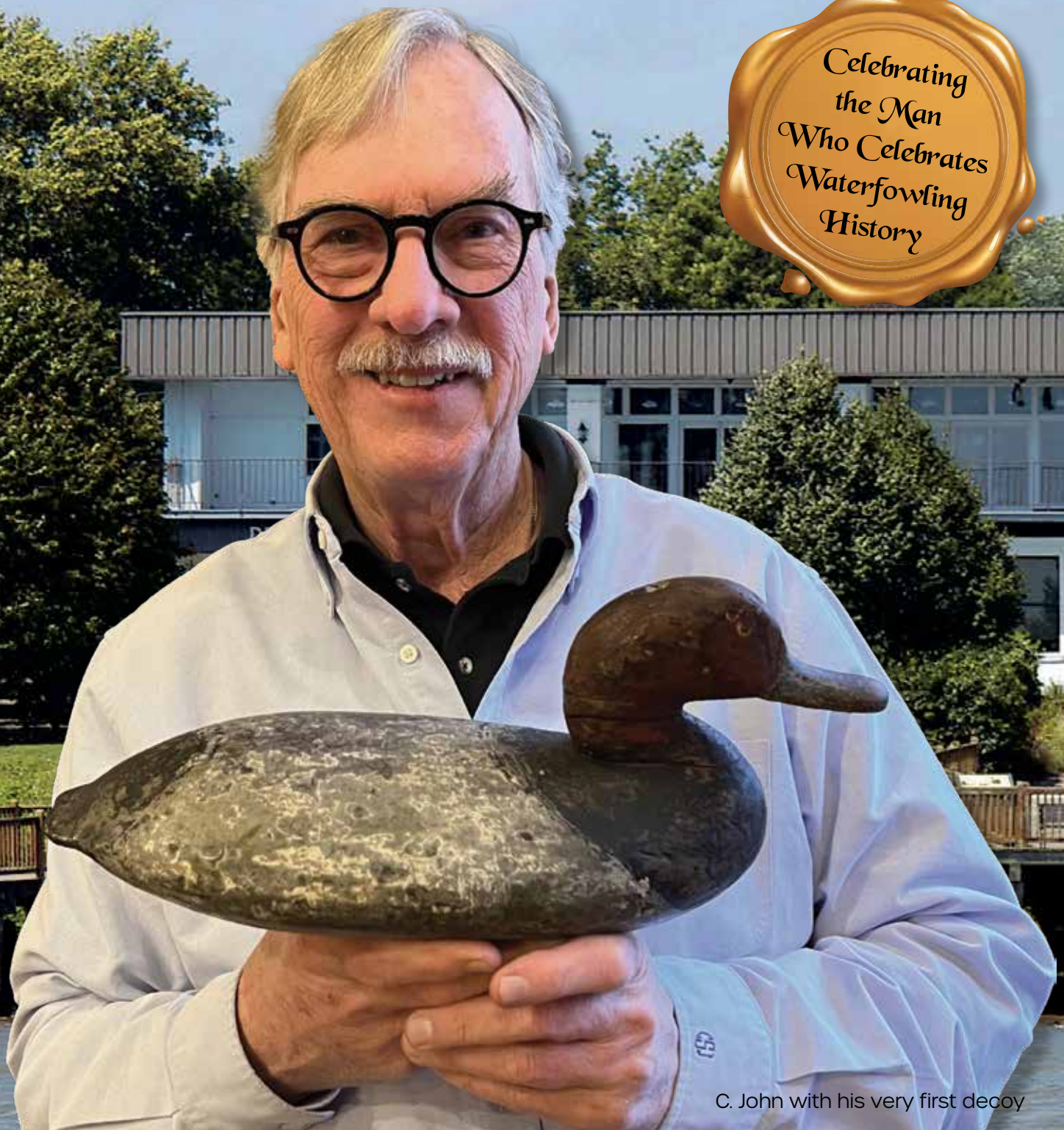
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C. John Sullivan, Jr.

A Living Treasure



C. John with his very first decoy

After a lifetime of collecting, preserving and sharing the stories of decoys and other waterfowling treasures, it turns out that the real treasure is the man himself.

By Chad Tragakis



C. John on his first day of work at the Harford County Courthouse



First day as Supervisor of Assessments in 1974



Exploring the decoys in the Pusey family barn

For C. John Sullivan, Jr., the world changed on December 16, 1953. That was the day his grandparents gave him an old redhead duck decoy, made by Ben Dye sometime around the Civil War. He didn't know it yet, but that single decoy would one day be joined by more than a thousand others, and that thoughtful gift would alter the course of his entire life.

Born in Baltimore City in 1945 to Clarence John Sullivan, Sr. and Sara Bell Robinson Sullivan, and raised in Fallston, Maryland in Harford County, C. John Sullivan, Jr. grew up to love everything about his rural community – its nature, history, people and traditions. In many ways, one could say that Sullivan's childhood was a typical all-American upbringing for his day and age, even idyllic in some respects. Life in Fallston of the 1950s was a bucolic fantasy for a young boy – the fields, forests, streams, and railroad tracks with high trestles were all a veritable playland tailor made for youthful outdoor adventures.

His childhood memories harken back to a different time – a two room schoolhouse with a pot belly stove for heat and an outhouse and hand pump for water outside, wholesome family meals eaten together, horses clopping through town, milk delivered fresh each morning, the values and ethics instilled through his small-town Catholic upbringing. He vividly remembers the family's annual trips to Ocean City, and summer picnics that featured

family hikes, chilling soda pop bottles in the brisk streams that ran through the nearby properties, ending with cookouts on an open fire. It was as if the best parts of Leave it to Beaver and Father Knows Best were made real. Norman Rockwell couldn't have captured it any better.

The tale of that first gift decoy from his grandmother is also somewhat humorous, as Sullivan recalls it was part of an effort to protect another pair proudly displayed by his parents in the family's home. In 1948, Sullivan's father went to work as a Harford County assessor; the other assessor was Grason Hopkins, an avid waterfowler. Hopkins had presented the senior Sullivan with a "pair" of ancient canvasback decoys from his gunning rig, consisting of a drake by John Graham and a hen by Jim Holly. Recognized even then as important and historic folk art, and valuable antiques with a connection to local history and a dear family friend, they received a place of honor on the living room hearth. Apparently, the very young, curious and hands-on "Johnny," as his parents called him, loved to play and occasionally abscond with these decoys.

Having been sufficiently "decoyed" himself, by his grandmother's generous gift, his parents' prized pair was saved. Sullivan's new acquisition quickly become the focal point of his childhood bedroom, in spite of the cowboy motif wallpaper, toys and other decorations. In time, however, Sullivan's focus on the Old West would give way to the equally storied and historic Chesapeake.



Sinkbox used by the Heisler family



C. John III with Barnard high-head canvasbacks

And while he continued to enjoy playing with his cap gun six-shooter, he found himself gravitating more and more toward history and artifacts that were much closer to home.

At one point, the young Sullivan thought his old Ben Dye redhead would look swell in the same shade of green that his father was using to re-paint the shutters. I'm sure it looked great and he says it matched the color scheme in his room at the time, but when he was about 18, he realized the error of his youthful ways and carefully stripped off that old green paint. In doing so, he discovered a carefully carved letter "H" in the bottom of the decoy. He was intrigued... what did it stand for? Was it the maker, the owner, something else? Could it help date the decoy or explain where or when it was used? What story could that single letter H help tell?

It took him several decades to figure it out, but eventually he came to learn that it was the rig mark of Capt. Joseph Heisler from Charlestown, in Cecil County. Armed with that nugget of information, he could quickly begin piecing together all the other elements of the story. One clue led to another, and another, and then another still. Thinking back, Sullivan points to that exact moment – uncovering the carved letter H when he stripped off that old green paint – as the true awakening of the collector's spirit within him. Not only did he begin searching for marked and branded decoys to help decipher the stories those antique lures held, but it set him on a path that would become a seven-decades-long avocation.

By age 13, he had inherited about six decoys, which included a pair of miniature canvasbacks his father had obtained in 1948 from Madison Mitchell, and another Mitchell redhead that came from his aunt. By age 18, he was actively seeking out old wooden duck decoys wherever he could find them, and purchasing them with whatever money he had.

At one point, Sullivan thought seriously about pursuing a career in education, as his mother did for nearly 60 years. No doubt, he would have made an outstanding teacher or professor, but inspired by the work of his father, he found his calling in public service. The day after he graduated from Bel Air High School in 1963, he went to work as a clerk for the Harford County Courthouse. He worked in a variety of roles, including issuing marriage licenses and recording deeds, as clerk to the Juvenile Court, and later as courtroom clerk to the chief judge. While working for the court, he enrolled at Loyola College in Baltimore, graduating with a Bachelor's degree in Sociology.

In 1966, Sullivan took a job with the State of Maryland government as an assessor. This afforded him the opportunity to work with and learn from Grason Hopkins, the same man who had worked with and trained his father. Grason's constant stories about the Bush River and Gunpower River Necks and tales of the days of old only fueled the fire of Sullivan's growing interest in and passion for decoys and waterfowling history.

When he became an assessor, lo and behold, the colleague in the office next door was none other than R. Madison Mitchell, Jr., son of R. Madison Mitchell, the prolific, influential, and well-respected dean of the Havre de Grace decoy makers. The younger Mitchell soon arranged for Sullivan to obtain many fine examples of his father's work, but more importantly, he became a steady source for quality collectible decoys, namely old gunners that were brought into his father's shop for re-painting. Sullivan was thrilled with the historic old birds, and the hunters were delighted when the old birds they brought in were replaced, at Sullivan's expense, with brand new Mitchell decoys. A true win-win!

The work of an assessor is a vital but largely invisible aspect of public service. They are responsible for valuing and listing all taxable property within a jurisdiction, administering and enforcing the property assessment and property tax laws, and ensuring fairness and uniformity in those processes. Sullivan rose steadily through the assessor ranks and his professional career, with both the state and the county, is remarkable in many respects. He was the youngest Supervisor of Assessments in Maryland state history, and upon his retirement in 2011, he held the state record as the longest serving supervisor.

His reputation for excellence and fairness held him in high regard by all the stakeholders he supported and served, and he has the distinction of being the only Director of the Maryland State Department of Assessments to be appointed by two governors from different political parties. He served his professional community as president of the Harford County Appraisers Society and as vice president of the Maryland Association of Assessing Officers. Upon leaving government, Sullivan continued his public service in a variety of other roles and appointments, including as a commissioner on the Harford County Liquor Control Board and later, chairman of that same board, and in volunteer positions with Harford County Parks & Recreation.

Family has always been a central part of Sullivan's life. He and his late wife Barbara had one child, a son, C. John Sullivan III, who can often be found at his father's side on collecting trips, at decoy shows, and other outings. Sullivan enjoys spending as much time as he can with grandson's Benjamin Blair Sullivan and Hamilton Bradley Sullivan, and with daughter-in-law Christen and her daughter, Olive. The whole family affectionately calls him "Big," a nickname that started as a fun way for Sullivan's family and friends to distinguish between C. John senior and junior, and it just sort of stuck from then on. Sullivan has been blessed to find love and companionship again with Peggy Reel, the two having rekindled a youthful romance that



C. John riding his Triumph motorcycle



C. John and Barbara on the front porch of Bon Air



John Graham decoys with period furnishings



With Henry Fleckenstein

first blossomed when they were in high school. Proud of his family heritage, Sullivan has traced his family's history in Maryland back to the early 1700s. He is a member of the Sons of the American Revolution, the Society of Colonial Wars, and the Society of the War of 1812.

A natural impulse to document and preserve

Sullivan describes his passion in many ways. Realizing he had grown to love the history behind the wooden ducks just as much as the objects themselves, he felt compelled to track down and uncover everything he possibly could about them; to get to the stories behind them – who carved them, who used them, where and how they were used, how different styles had evolved over the years and been passed down. For 65 years, that search – that quest – has never stopped, and it has led him into countless attics, basements, and boatsheds, along with museums, archives, decoy shows, auctions, and flea markets. "I know that 'Holy Grail' is out there, just waiting for me," he explains. It is a thirst, he says, that will never be satisfied.

Looking back, Sullivan points to a few key moments that really set in motion his life-long journey of collecting, discovering and documenting. There was the aforementioned discovery of the meaning behind the letter H carved into the bottom of his first decoy. But Sullivan credits, first and foremost, his

parents for instilling in him a sense of who he is, where he comes from, and why those things matter. His father, as a county assessor, and his mother, as a teacher, both felt a strong connection to their community and its history, and they passed that on to their son and his older sister, Susan. From there, Sullivan has said that when staring at old family photos, he wishes he could somehow jump into them and join his ancestors for the adventures that he wasn't alive to see or experience. In a sense, his entire life's work of preserving history – of his family, his community, his county, his region, and his state – has been an attempt at time-travel.

Sullivan's grandfather, Robert Henry Sullivan (whom he sometimes calls "the boy of the cook" in reference to the way he was listed on an early genealogical document), worked as a bridge and building foreman for the Maryland and Pennsylvania Railroad. When he was 16, Sullivan discovered an old stage coach box containing detailed timebooks, diaries and records from his grandfather's daily work, some dating back to 1918. Sullivan calls this trove of information and insight his very favorite family artifact, and probably the single most influential thing that has shaped his sensibility as a preserver of history.

Inspired by his grandfather's railroad diaries, and the daily journals kept by various family members, including his mother and grandmother, as well



Part of the black duck display



Holly family and Havre de Grace decoys



Rare Upper Bay teal



Iconic cast iron Chesapeake Bay Retriever from the Bartlett-Hayward Company foundry

as his own compulsion to record important and mundane aspects of his life and work for posterity, Sullivan has been steadfast in keeping a daily journal. It has helped him immensely when trying to remember or recall a certain date or event from year's past, and perhaps more than that, it has given him deeper appreciation for the recording and record-keeping of the hunters and gunning club members whose books and journals have been so helpful in preserving the history of waterfowling's past.

Perhaps the single greatest contribution Sullivan has made to the decoy community is the incredible body of work he has published, representing decades of diligence and research. His books include: *A Chronicle of Letters, Robert F. McGaw, Jr. Decoy Maker 1879-1958* (1985); *Waterfowling, The Upper Chesapeake's Legacy* (1987); *Captured in Wood, An Album of Decoys from the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum*, co-authored with Karla Mattson (1996); *Old Ocean City, The Journal and Photographs of Robert Craighead Walker* (2001); *Waterfowling on the Chesapeake, 1819-1936* (2003); *Chesapeake Bay Retrievers, Decoys & Long Guns, Tales of the Carroll's Island Ducking Club* (2008); *The Best Place to Shoot Ducks, Miller's Island* (2013); *Swan Island Club, A History 1872-2014* (2014); *Chesapeake Ducking Guns – Baltimore Made* (2016); *Record Walnut Grove Ducking Club 1864* (2016); *Waterfowling: Maryland's Legislative Timeline* (2017); *Decoys and Stories* (2017); *Bishops Head Fish and Gun Club* (2018); *Marshy Point Ducking Club* (2019); and *Eildon Ducking Club, Gunning Records & Logs* (2021).

In addition to his books, Sullivan has authored dozens of articles in *Decoy Magazine*, *The Canvasback*, and other publications including *Wildfowl Art*, *The Weather Gauge*, and *Maryland Humanities*. And in addition to all that, for many years in the 1980s and 1990s, he and Henry Fleckenstein co-wrote the captions and descriptions for the decoy auction catalogs of Richard W. Oliver Auction Gallery.

The all-consuming intensity of his passion has, he will admit, left little time for some things that others find important and enjoyable, including watching television, reading the newspaper, and engaging in social media. He would much rather read one of the many ancient gunning club logs and hunter's journals that he owns, hold and study every inch of one of his favorite old decoys, pore over land records, maps and charts, study boxes of old waterfowling photographs he's collected, or revisit notes from his countless personal interviews with those who were there. To Sullivan, this is time well spent.

Sullivan takes great pride in the fact that he has never strayed far from his beloved family home in Fallston; he was raised on a property dating back to 1774 known as *Stoney Batter*, he next lived in a historic 18th century home, *Bon Air*, for 10 years, before moving to his current Gorsuch Garth home in 1986 – all within two miles of one another. This connection to place has instilled in him another passion; the preservation and celebration of historic properties. This led him to personally ensuring that *Bon Air* and the nearby Little Falls Friends Meting House were added to the National Register of Historic Places, that the historic Joesting-Gorsuch House and the old St. Mark's Catholic Church in Fallston were carefully relocated so that they could be safely preserved, and most recently, that the historic Aquila Scott House root cellar, one of the last remaining structures of its kind in Maryland, was protected.

Discovering treasures & lifelong friends along the way

Starting at such a young age, being in precisely the right place at the right time, and with a relentless drive to uncover the next great treasure, Sullivan has amassed an incredible collection. Those who have seen it in its entirety say it rivals several of the museums dedicated to displaying decoys, boats and waterfowling artifacts. In truth, it may in fact surpass several of them in terms of both quality and quantity. Some of the very best examples of decoys by



Early rig of Madison Mitchell canvasbacks



Dean family skiff and punt gun with Barnard decoys



Bob McGaw canvasbacks

the most important and sought after Chesapeake Bay makers line seemingly endless rows of shelves throughout his spacious home. Many of his exceptional decoys have won top honors in the various old decoy contests hosted by area clubs, museums and held in conjunction with local decoy shows.

Among the countless waterfowling treasures he has on display are a rare gunning skiff with a mounted multi-barrel gun once owned by the Vandiver family of Havre de Grace, one of the few surviving bushwhack boats made by Jim Holly once owned by the Pusey family of Harford County, and an almost impossible to find complete sinkbox that once belonged to the Heisler family of Charlestown. The walls of his home are adorned with one of the finest collections of relief carvings made by folk artist and decoy maker Joseph Coudon of Aiken, Maryland. Sullivan says he loves living in the midst of his collection, and wherever he or others go in the house, they are surrounded by art and artifacts, and by the history and stories related to each of those special objects.

Sullivan has had his share of major finds, historical discoveries and unearthed treasures over the course of his very long collecting career. He calls these his "Lovelock Cave" moments, in reference to the famous Nevada rock shelter where a group of 2,000-year-old Native American canvasback lures, the oldest known decoys from North America, were found in 1924.

Some of these finds were rigs of decoys and unique artifacts, but among the most satisfying of his discoveries were information that he uncovered and the seemingly unrelated dots that he connected. In many cases, it's difficult for Sullivan to separate his most memorable finds and discoveries from the people who were involved, and this is understandable as so many of them were intertwined with long-standing personal relationships. He's made countless friendships, many having carried on for decades now, all through a shared passion for decoys and waterfowling history.

His lifelong friendship with fellow decoy collector, historian and author Henry A. Fleckenstein, Jr. began when the two were just boys, and it became the source of both many wonderful memories and many wonderful decoys. The pair collected and exhibited together, traveled to shows together, and enjoyed sharing new information and leads on decoys and rigs to pursue. Beginning in the 1970s, Sullivan and Fleckenstein began referring to each other as "Captain" as a fun way to honor the traditional old waterman's title. This parlance continued throughout Fleckenstein's life, and Sullivan continues to use it when he meets certain collector friends. In Henry's later years, he and Sullivan would often hold gatherings to study, compare and discuss decoys from their respective collections. They dubbed these gatherings "decoy round tables" and they remain a treasured memory for Sullivan. One of his favorite stories about Fleckenstein involves the old



Jim Holly made bushwhack boat from the Pusey family



Jim Holly sinkbox scene painting with shorebirds and black ducks

record book from the historic Walnut Grove Gun Club, an important artifact that was promised to Sullivan as part of a trade the pair had made years earlier. After Fleckenstein's passing, the long-lost journal was found by his wife, Pam, and delivered to Sullivan, who memorialized both the club and the story of friendship behind its re-discovery with a book in 2016.

"I remember so well standing inside one of Henry's sheds in East New Market," he vividly recalls, "and discussing the decoys branded TJH and ELB. We both speculated on whose initials were displayed on their iron pad ballast weights." Just a few months later, while serving as tax assessor for Harford County, Sullivan discovered 16 wooden biscuit boxes in the old courthouse attic in Bel Air, containing extensive assessment records from the period 1896 to 1902, which were being discarded. "It is hard to convey what went through my mind when I opened the assessor's field book from 1896 and saw the listing of the hundreds of decoys owned by Bartlett and Hayward," he thinks back, having thus solved the TJH and ELB mystery. He preserved these records and they have been a treasure trove of information about the region's historic old clubs.

In addition to the records, Sullivan has been fortunate to develop relationships with a variety of people who could help shed light on the waterfowling heritage of the Bush River and Gunpowder Necks region. "Over the years my friendships with Mary Helen Cadwalader, brother Benjamin, and cousin John Cadwalader led to a deep appreciation of their family's estate, Maxwell's Point," he states. "Their willingness to share photographs, journals, and correspondence along with a magnificent 4-gauge breechloading gun used by their ancestors allowed me to time-travel back to that wonderful place."

His visits with Mrs. Blanche Fletcher, whose grandfather was Benjamin Jeffers, the keeper of the shore at the San Domingo Gunning Club, awarded him with some great tales of the Gunpowder Neck along with the ribbon-bound tribute to Benjamin Jeffers by club members. And in 2007, Sullivan was contacted by Ferdinand Latrobe, member of one of Baltimore's most

notable families, as he had some family history, stories, and photographs to share. "We met in Baltimore at the historic Maryland Club," Sullivan shares, "and I clearly remember opening up a large paper bag and retrieving pages of the Carroll's Island Gunning Club photo album, and once again I stepped into Lovelock Cave! Great photographs, great stories, and a visual trip back in time."

Another vivid memory of Sullivan's early days of collecting was the result of a display he set up for a local chapter of Ducks Unlimited at the Maryland Golf and Country Club. "I had set up the display before the guests arrived at the event," he explains, "and just moments before the doors opened, I was told I could not have my name on the display as it took away from the DU focus. I removed my name and placed it under a table, and as I was doing that, Charlie Lutz, Tommy Brooks, and Donald Hayes, three older gentlemen that knew me and my family, approached me and said 'we didn't know you liked these old wooden decoys; we have some if you are interested.' As a result of that very first display, I was able to add 100 Madison Mitchell decoys to my collection."

Nearly 50 years ago in 1975, Sullivan met Robert N. Hockaday, Jr., a like-minded enthusiast who became a life-long friend. "We were both in Pete's Pickins, an antique shop in Upper Falls, Maryland, on the same day; the lady who owned the shop introduced us and asked us to help move a rather substantial piece of furniture. After the move was complete, our friendship was bonded and we have traveled and collected many things together through the years. Bob found one of my Harry Emmords swan decoys in the basement of a house on the Bush River. Over the years, Bob has called me many times when he finds a good old decoy or waterfowling artifact."

One of Sullivan's most important and most memorable discoveries came in 1976, just after he purchased a pair of canvasback decoys at the local Bel Air Auction Gallery. "The decoys wore the brand of J. Pusey," he shared, "and when I returned home the evening of the auction, I called the Pusey home." Early the next morning, he met John M. M. Pusey on his farm adjacent to



Early gunning skiff with a rare multi-barrel gun



Punt gun with bufflehead and bluebill decoys



C. John, C. John III and Lem Ward

the Aberdeen Proving Ground on Swan Creek. The ensuing relationship with the Pusey family that began that day lasted throughout the rest of their lives. “Stepping into the warehouse at the Pusey farm was to be my next visit to Lovelock Cave. There were hundreds of decoys from the family rig. It was in the Pusey warehouse that I found the magnificent Charles Nelson Barnard high-head canvasback decoys.” And as if on cue, it was after displaying those same Barnard decoys, that he was approached by members of the Barnard family, which fostered yet another treasured connection for Sullivan. “Through relationships with sons Fred and Homer and grandson Nelson Berg, I purchased many Barnard family artifacts, miniatures, tools, patterns, and Barnard’s toolbox,” he notes.

Thinking back upon other longtime relationships with fellow collectors, Sullivan points to Ronnie Newcomb of Church Creek, Maryland. “Captain Ronnie loves the deal,” he explains, “and our trades of prized items from our respective collections would confuse even the most sophisticated collectors and dealers.” Sullivan traded away an impressive collection of oyster cans and other nearly-impossible to find artifacts for a wonderful gunning skiff, complete with a large bore breechloader punt gun, formerly used by the Dean family of Hoopers Island in Dorchester County. He loves the rare skiff and gun, and it holds a place of honor in his home, but to this day, he doesn’t like to think about the things he had to give up to get it.

Beginning in the late 1970s, Sullivan conducted what he calls some “serious” trades with Vance Strausburg, who has been a friend ever since. “In a weak moment, I let a few really good things escape,” he says, but smiles when noting that he’s since been able to buy back some of those special items. Another longtime friend, Michael Stranahan, was a regular at the Crompton auctions, where Sullivan sold him a great pair of decoys that have traded hands many times since. Although he still misses those decoys, they have been great friends for nearly 50 years. His friendship with Sam Dyke was cemented when Sullivan and Henry Fleckenstein were asked by Richard Oliver to catalog the sales he conducted with the Ward Museum beginning in the mid-1980s.

In 1991, the Maryland Historical Society curated a special exhibit on Chesapeake Bay waterfowling and the state’s finest decoys. It was Sullivan’s participation in the exhibition that introduced him to J. Fife Symington, T. Edward Hambleton, and Henry Stansbury. “My friendship with T. Edward and J. Fife led me to the discovery of the Grace’s Quarter gunning log and the incredible history of that famous gunning shore,” he reflects. “My decades-long friendship with Henry Stansbury and our mutual love of Maryland waterfowling heritage have enriched my collecting experience.”



Susquehanna Flats black ducks



C. John and Henry Fleckenstein with their sons C. John III and Josh at the Havre de Grace Decoy Festival

His friendship with Harry Weiskittel of the famous Marshy Point Farm and site of the renowned Marshy Point Gunning Club was another treasure in Sullivan's search for the old wooden artifacts that he cherishes. "I discovered wonderful photographs of Marshy Point and its famous Chesapeake Bay Retrievers, and I explored the recesses of the attic and corn crib, rescuing bits and pieces of that historic waterfowling mecca," he remembers. These discoveries combined with other information he was able to uncover resulted in the publication of a book on the Marshy Point Gunning Club in 2019. His friendship with Pete Lesher, chief historian and chief curator at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, and vice president of the Talbot County Council, goes back more than three decades. "Pete is a great sounding board and has been a terrific source of specific details on maritime history," he says.

In 2001, he met Mrs. Frank Beck in her waterfront home in Baltimore County, the result of persistently following up a lead given to him by Henry Fleckenstein. Beck was a Maryland trapshooting champion and longtime hunting guide. Sullivan's discovery of his dusty old rig in the garage provided him with a few choice decoys, but much more important to him were the stories Mrs. Beck shared of her late husband's shooting and waterfowling experiences. Sullivan's friendship with former Maryland State Senator C. A. Porter Hopkins provided access to his personal archives with notes, correspondence, narratives and histories of the earliest Maryland gunning clubs. "In addition to those materials," he adds, "his stories have been the source of several of my writing efforts. I spent many great days with him." Sullivan also arranged for the donation of the Hopkins collection to a museum, where others will be able to consult and enjoy it. His friendship with Grayson Winterbottom is celebrated in his history of the Bishops Head Gunning Club.

A phone call from the president of the Swan Island Ducking Club in Currituck, North Carolina, Mr. Leslie Disharoon, led Sullivan uncharacteristically off of his home turf and afforded him the rare opportunity to experience firsthand one of the oldest gunning clubs on the Atlantic Coast. "It was an adventure to a different place and a different time," he says solemnly, "where traditions were as important as the game harvested." The experience also resulted in yet another outstanding work from Sullivan, an in-depth history of the storied club spanning its origins in 1872 all the way up to the present day.

Closer to home, he's formed longtime friendships with many locals including decoy maker, former Havre de Grace Decoy Museum president and current president of the Harford County Council, Patrick Vincenti. "My relationship with Pat goes back to his days of baking donuts at the Bel Air Bakery," he reflects. "He has been the source of many great decoys and artifacts." Sullivan has also been lifelong friends with the O'Neill family of Forest Hill in Harford County. "Patrick O'Neill is one of the best auctioneers I have heard," he says, "and he found my best punt gun that rests on my living room book shelves. And, thanks to him, I now own what are perhaps the best 'Daddy' Holly oversized cast iron canvasbacks, which are now a part of the Daddy Holly display at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum."

A not so local friend, the noted English visual artist and bird carver Guy Taplin, has helped give Sullivan a new perspective on the things he collects, studies and loves. "I met my dear friend Guy in the late 1980s, and we have traded decoys and stories regularly ever since then," he shares. "He has been the driving force of getting me across the Atlantic many times. I miss the decoys that I brought and left there with Guy, but I cherish the things that came home with me." This is a common refrain that Sullivan shares when he thinks back on all the many friendships that yielded a lifetime of great things, but more so, a lifetime of great memories and experiences. Looking back on all the deals, all the trades, all the stuff, Sullivan clearly enjoys all of it, but when it's all over and when that last deal is done, he reflects thoughtfully, it is the relationships that have meant the most.

Giving back

Though he lives among a collection that rivals those of many public galleries and archives, Sullivan has provided decades of support, expertise and counsel to numerous museums and institutions through the many roles, committees and volunteer leadership posts he's held over the years. Among these are serving as Chairman of the Harford County Committee of the Maryland Historical Trust, on the Board of Directors of the Harford County Historical Society, on the Curatorial, Maritime, Museum and Sporting Art Committees of the Maryland Historical Society, on the board of the Ward Foundation and the Ward Museum of Wildfowl Art, as a Trustee of the Maryland Center for History and Culture, on the board of Liriodendron Foundation, and on the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum's Waterfowling Building Committee and vice chairman of its Curatorial Committee.

He's served in a wide range of roles for the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum, including on the board of directors, curatorial committee, as a senior advisor, and from 2011 to 2013, as Director of Operations. He has graciously loaned and donated decoys, books and artifacts to the collections of these and many other organizations and institutions, and in 2008, he established the C. John Sullivan, Jr. Endowment to support the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum.

Sullivan is frequently consulted by fellow collectors, museums and institutions and is always happy to share his knowledge with others. He has been a guest speaker on decoys, waterfowling and Chesapeake Bay history at Johns Hopkins University, the Maryland Historical Society, Ducks Unlimited, The Havre de Grace Decoy Museum, the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, The Ward Museum of Wildfowl Art, The Wednesday Club of the Maryland Club, The Outlaw Gunners Men's Club, the Rotary Club of Harford County, the Havre de Grace Chamber of Commerce, the U.S. Army's Aberdeen Proving Grounds, meetings of the Potomac Decoy Collectors Association, and the Marshy Point Nature Center. He has been featured in magazines, podcasts, and on television,



Judging at the Ward World Championships



With Peggy Reel



Miniature swan collection



Exhibit celebrating Harford County's 250th Anniversary

including Voice of America, Ramsey Russell's *Duck Season Somewhere*, and Maryland Public Television's Chesapeake Decoys: *The Nature of Waterfowl Art*.

For as long as anyone can remember, Sullivan and his vast treasures have been a constant presence at the Harry M. Walsh Waterfowling History and Artifacts exhibits at the annual Easton Waterfowl Festival. And over the years, he has supported or curated a wide range of landmark exhibitions. Among them, *Maryland's Finest Decoys* at the Maryland Historical Society in 1991, *Objects of the Chesapeake* exhibition at Government House in Annapolis in 2001, and a series of innovative exhibits at the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, including: *Sink or Swim? Sinkbox Decoys from the Susquehanna Flats in 2000*, *Gunning Among Friends: Gunning Clubs on the Chesapeake in 2012*, *Carvers at the Crossroads: Sharing Ideas, Techniques and Styles Across the Chesapeake's Susquehanna Flats* in 2014, and *Chesapeake Swan Song: From Commodity to Conservation* in 2015. Also in 2015, he supported the inaugural heritage timeline exhibit at the Ducks Unlimited Waterfowling Heritage Center in Memphis, Tennessee, and most recently, in 2023, he supported *Innovation, Industry and Influence: The Decoys of John "Daddy" Holly – Pioneer of the Havre de Grace Style* with the Potomac Decoy Collectors Association at the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum. Beyond decoys, he developed a special exhibit to celebrate Harford County's 250th Anniversary in 2023, commemorating the signing of the Bush Declaration, expressing the county's patriotic support for independence from England.

In addition to the museums and historical societies, Sullivan has been a member of numerous conservation organizations and decoy collecting clubs, such as Ducks Unlimited, the Maryland Ornithological Society, East Coast Decoy Collectors Association, Potomac Decoy Collectors Association, and Long Island Decoy Collectors Association. He is also an active member of the Outdoor Writers Association of America and the Maryland Club.

Not surprisingly, the distinction of being named the decoy festival's 2024 honorary chairman is just the latest in a very long line of honors and awards Sullivan has received. He was made an Admiral of the Chesapeake by Maryland Governor Marvin Mandel in 1976, he received a Governor's Citation from Maryland Governor Harry Hughes in 1986, followed by a second Admiral of the Chesapeake award by Governor William Donald Schaefer in 1991. He was named a State of Maryland Chesapeake Bay Ambassador by Governor Martin O'Malley in 2011, elected to the Easton Waterfowl Festival Hall of Fame in 2012, and appointed to the Maryland Migratory Game Bird

Advisory Commission by Governor Larry Hogan in 2016. In 2018, he received a Commendation of Excellence from the Commanding General of Aberdeen Proving Ground, and that same year received a Ducks Unlimited Presidential Proclamation. In 2022, he was proclaimed a Harford County Maryland Living Treasure, and in April of this year, he was honored by the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution with their prestigious Historic Preservation Medal. It's safe to say this will not be the last award Sullivan receives in recognition of his many outstanding achievements.

Advice for collectors

As a seasoned and senior member in the field of decoy collecting, Sullivan is often consulted for advice on how best to approach the hobby. First and foremost, he says, an understanding of the art of the decoy is essential. As a foundation, a true collector must appreciate the history of the decoy as one of America's unique contributions to art. Second, they must be able to see the beauty in nature in order to fully appreciate the beauty of the wooden fowl created to attract the real thing. Lastly, they must understand that decoys were tools of the hunter's trade, and therefore must appreciate their significance to waterfowling.

Beyond those basics, his advice to any collector is to buy what you like, but have a system of some type or parameters around which to develop and build your collection. For example, a specific region, a specific maker or factory, a particular species, or a certain type or style of decoy. With this approach, a collection can be built and refined over time. Sullivan has never formed or adopted any grand collecting strategy or approach that guides what he pursues or buys. Instead, he takes his own advice and simply buys what he likes. He does, however, share that before any new piece comes into the house, he has a pretty good sense of exactly where it's going to go.

Sullivan stresses that collectors should favor originality wherever possible, and must be wary of the many fakes that have unfortunately found their way into the marketplace. He frowns upon collecting as an investment, suggesting that those concerned with value and appreciation are better off putting their money into stocks or bonds. In terms of decoy maintenance, he offers some time-tested suggestions. To minimize cracking and flaking of paint that comes with temperature fluctuation, keep decoys away from direct sunlight and intense heat. Leave oils and waxes for wood floors and furniture, not decoys. Never try to clean a decoy with anything harsh or abrasive. Genuine,



With Guy Taplin



With C. John III



With C. A. Porter Hopkins

time-enhanced patina is so important and simply cannot be improved upon, so leave the surface of your decoys alone. If needed, a very light dusting from time to time is his best recommendation. Don't do anything to a decoy that can't be reversed, and for Sullivan, this includes adding collector brands and markings. Most importantly, he stresses that we must never forget that as collectors, we are but caretakers, in the grand scheme of things, for a relatively short time, and we must take that responsibility seriously and earnestly.

For all his love of the art of the decoy, Sullivan says that he's never tried carving or painting himself. He also notes that he isn't really a duck hunter, but he's gone out on a few occasions, more so for the stories than anything else. One such occasion came in the fall of 1975, when Sullivan's lifelong friend William H. Cox, Jr., a member of the Maryland House of Delegates, took him on a Canada goose hunt on the farm of Maryland State Senator Frederick Malkus in Dorchester County. "That adventure and others to the Malkus family farms became the source of some great gunning tales," he remembers.

Like many collectors, Sullivan has found perhaps as much enjoyment in seeking out "related items" to complement his decoy collection as he has from the decoys themselves. These include shotguns (with those being passed down in his family and those made in Baltimore being his favorites), large bore fowling pieces, hunting licenses, miniatures and decorative carvings, loading tools, carving tools, patterns, cartridge boxes, shell boxes, powder cans, powder horns, shot bags, anchor weights, keel weights, taxidermy mounts, advertising, paintings, prints, paperweights, photographs, maps, documents, ephemera and a library of sporting, ornithology and history books consisting of several thousand titles, among many, many other items.

These "related items" have grown to include even boats, a sinkbox, and the shelving and racks from decoy maker's workshops. Sullivan also enjoys collecting early Harford County furniture, paintings, and historical and architectural accessories, and he's a lifelong British motorcycle enthusiast. He observes that we gather things around us to anchor us to where we come from, or to mark a certain life or lifestyle that we aspire to. For Sullivan, maybe it's a little bit of both.

Building a legacy

Sullivan has said that while many times he finds himself fearing for what the future may bring, he seems to fear just as much, or more, for the loss of our past. "Some few of us look to the past for enrichment and nourishment,"

he explains, "and it's vital to preserve our heritage for future generations – something that could otherwise be lost forever." This is a huge part of what drives him so relentlessly to preserve and record. But more than anything, he just loves decoys. His face lights up and he still gets giddy when he holds a new piece or one of his longtime favorites. "I look at these things each and every day," he says, "and focus on how incredibly blessed I am to be the caretaker of these extremely rare artifacts." For Sullivan, an old decoy is much more than a hunter's tool, and much more than even a work of art. For Sullivan, that old decoy is a time capsule of waterfowling history. Just holding it, he is transported back to another place and time. He reflects on the decoy's complete story – who made it, who it was made for, where it was used, how it was used, the ducks that were lured in over it. All of this becomes immediate and absorbing, almost consuming.

He has multiples of many choice decoys in his collection, most being rig-mates from special groups of historic birds or rare and unusual species. In his endless quest for that next great discovery, he often jokes that he really prefers to have an even number of decoys in his displays... unless he already has an even number of them. Then, of course, he much prefers an odd number. But jokes aside, Sullivan has long realized that when the time comes for him to leave this world, he'll take none of these wonderful treasures with him. They certainly give him incredible enjoyment now, but his lifetime of collecting has been largely with an eye toward the future, toward the generations to come. Like the gunning journals and photo albums he's discovered, preserved, and interpreted for appreciative readers, all this "stuff," he says, is just stuff. At the same time, for the like-minded souls who feel a kinship with Sullivan, this "stuff" is the stuff that dreams are made of, the stuff that allows us to reflect and remember, the stuff that helps us envision and imagine, the stuff that brings the past here into the present and projects it long into the future.

As we all get older, it's natural to think about the legacy we will leave behind, and how future generations will remember us. So, how does C. John Sullivan, Jr. want to be remembered? "I would hope people would remember me as someone who saved all this stuff," he reflects thoughtfully, "saved it from being lost, saved this waterfowling history, saved these pieces of Harford County." I am confident he will enjoy precisely that remembrance, and much more, for many generations to come. Still, for everything he's done, with all the accolades and honors he's received, and though it seems there is little room remaining on his shelves for even one more decoy, at age 78, C. John Sullivan is nowhere near done collecting, researching, writing, sharing or preserving. After all, the next great decoy, that "Holy Grail," is still out there!

Workshop Window

By Cindy Currier

Jimmy Bowden

Assawoman, VA

In this installment of Workshop Window, we feature the workshop of carver, Jimmy Bowden. Jimmy started carving at the young age of 13 under the guidance of carver Miles Hancock. He initially carved miniatures and progressed to hand-chopping hunting decoys. When you pull into the Bowden “compound”, you’re welcomed by at least a dozen pet peacocks and a friendly pet goose, named Bomber! The property is home to several structures and aviary pens. Jimmy’s 400 sq. ft. shop was built in 1992 and is elevated, overlooking a private marsh.

The inside of the shop is chock full of wood in every possible stage of a decoy and a feast for the eyes. Please enjoy this visual tour!





Redhead Duck

(*Athya americana*)



“How fleeting are all human passions compared with the massive continuity of ducks”

- *Dorothy Sayer (novelist)*

By John Hughes

*Photo courtesy of
Scott Moody*

CANVASBACK NATURALIST

Each edition will feature a natural history topic relating to the mission of the museum. The author, **John E. Hughes, Jr.** is a retired science teacher from the John Carroll School (1972-2015). His subject areas included Chesapeake Bay Studies, Ecology (freshwater and marine) and Environmental Science. As a naturalist, John helped to develop natural history programs for a myriad of environmental organizations and schools. As a field educator and canoe guide, he led trips throughout the Eastern United States (especially the Southeast), Central America and the Caribbean. He presently serves as a member of the Museum's Board.

One of the greatest experiences on a birding adventure is to observe a bird that wasn't expected to be seen that day. The excitement of spotting a rare or uncommon bird is a feeling that makes the discomfort on any trip worthwhile and is that which keeps many watchers coming back. I still remember spotting a harlequin duck at the Naval Academy in Annapolis, a red bishop in phragmites reeds at Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge in Delaware, and a great potoo in Caroni swamp in Trinidad as sightings that gave me a wondrous sense of elation. I had hoped to see a variety of birds on those days, but in no way thought that those birds would be there on that day. It was a rare and unforgettable moment not to have been anticipated. There are, however, certain birds that could or should be expected to be seen on a trip. They seem common to many watchers, but to that individual birder (me) just cannot be found. Often listed as abundant or common on a regional birding list, the bird doesn't seem to come my way. Whether not being in the right spot at the right time, lacking the skills or appropriate equipment, or lacking patience and/or luck, the bird isn't to be had. Perhaps that's why I'm jumping for joy when I do see it even though for most of my fellow birders, it's just not that big a deal. It can be frustrating but that is probably what creates the excitement and keeps the birder (me, again) on the prowl. It doesn't mean, the birder (me, again! final notation!), cannot find that bird, but it isn't spotted with the regularity that should be expected. As rock musician Warren Zevon would say, "Poor, poor, pitiful me!"

For me, the bird that fits this mold is the redhead duck (*Athya americana*), especially when considering wintering waterfowl in the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland. As a lifetime naturalist and birdwatcher, I can not understand why I can't find more redheads on my outings. Although I first saw redheads as a kid in the 1950s and have probably seen them every year since then, it is never as often or in the abundance that I expect. It is for that reason, that I just do not anticipate seeing them. Case in point is this year's Audubon Christmas Bird Count, when thousands of bluebill and ruddies, hundreds of cans and geese, and numerous puddle ducks were listed, but only four redheads. Are they avoiding me and my team? I know the Chesapeake Bay only receives about 10-11% of the wintering redheads (Crossley, *The Crossley ID Guide, Waterfowl*, pp. 416-419), but the environmental conditions in Furnace Bay in Cecil County, Maryland are ideal for them. I do not know if hunting pressure in the area near the same time led to a decrease in redhead sightings, but it sure did not impact the scaup and cans. Maybe I should just quit whining and winter over in the Laguna Madres of Texas and Mexico where most redheads seem to winter. It's there that I should be able to expect daily observations and an abundance of redheads. It's there that my skill level, equipment, and luck could change, and I could begin to look at redheads in a new way. So much for albatrosses!

The redhead is a beautiful, medium-sized diving duck whose population is concentrated almost entirely in North America. It

belongs to a group of 12 diving ducks called pochards. Pochard characteristics include: **1)** Legs located farther to the posterior of their bodies than puddle ducks. This makes them better equipped for diving and swimming underwater but awkward when walking on land or attempting to vault into flight. Pochards must all run along the water's surface in order to get airborne. **2)** Large feet and webbing along with long toes which enhances diving efficiency. **3)** Distribution is in the temperate zone of the Northern hemisphere. **4)** Although omnivorous, they feed primarily on vegetation. **5)** They are strong, fast fliers. **6)** They lack iridescent coloring on their "speculum", but the drake's head is iridescent. **7)** Weak voices because of trachea bulb's shape. **8)** They are sexually mature in the first year. **9)** Many pochards are nest parasites. **10)** They practice long distance migration from breeding to wintering grounds. And **11)** Breeding grounds are fairly shallow wetlands (less than 6 feet deep) and wintering areas tend to be embayed water (less than 10 feet deep). They can be spotted on deeper water, but their activities range to the shallow. The redhead exhibits all of these characteristics.

Redhead Biography

Size: The redhead duck is slightly smaller than a canvasback but larger than a bluebill or ring-necked duck. It averages a length of 20 inches and weighs about 2.5 pounds. The drake bird is larger than the hen by about an inch and 1/3 of a pound.

Description: The drake redhead has a coppery/cinnamon iridescent red head. His lower neck, shoulders, and tail are dark black. His main body is light to dark gray with a white belly. The hen redhead is a warm brown all over. The top of the head and back are darker brown. She has a white belly and a lighter brown/white area next to her bill. Neither sex exhibits a colored speculum. Various modifications occur in color plumage throughout the year especially to the male while molting. Immatures resemble females in coloring. The drake has a bright yellow eye while the female's eye is black. Both sexes have a blue-gray bill with a black tip. A thin white band can be seen between the blue of the main stem and the black of the tip. Feet are a dark gray-black.

Shape: Redhead ducks have a very rounded head. The ridge of the bill and forehead exhibit a concave shape. Redheads appear more rounded than linear at a distance. The duck seems to ride higher in the water than other pochards.

Similar species: Canvasback, lesser and greater scaup, and ring-necked ducks are often confused with redheads especially from a distance. Drakes are easier to distinguish but females require quite an effort for appropriate identification. Ring-necked ducks also offer certain key variations for identification. A Peterson or National Geographic Bird Guide is a super tool to aid in identification. The following chart helps to differentiate redheads from canvasbacks.

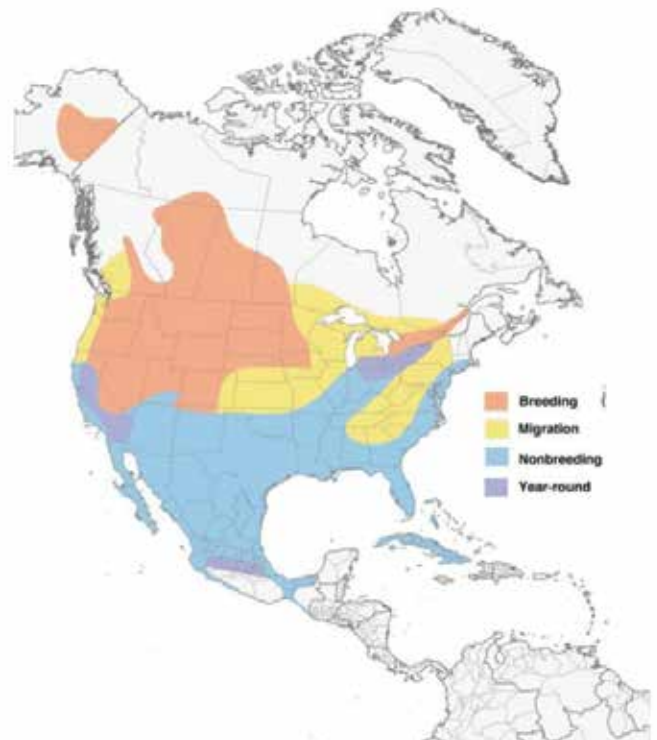


Drake Redhead - Photo courtesy of Scott Moody



Hen Redhead - Photo courtesy of Internet: Ornithology

Distribution: Redheads can be found throughout North America from northern Canada and Alaska, through the United States, and into Mexico. They are not generally found in the Caribbean, except Cuba. Breeding grounds can be found in areas supporting shallow wetlands especially the prairie pothole regions of the Plains areas. Wintering grounds are in saline coastal areas all along the Gulf and Pacific coast regions. Favorite areas are usually shallow (less than 10 feet in depth) and embayed behind barrier beach islands along the Gulf coast. They tend to be long distance migrators with about 10% using the Atlantic Coast flyway and the others using the Central and Pacific flyways. See the following map and chart.



Reproduction and Nesting: Pair bonds occur yearly and are established through very active courtship. Many happen during the first wintering of the birds or shortly after arrival on the nesting grounds. The bonds are short lived and only last until egg incubation. Redheads are not committed parents and the female does most if not all the work.

Nesting is in shallow wetlands such as prairie potholes and other marshes which have heavy emergent vegetation for cover such as cattails or hardstem bullrush. Water depth is extremely shallow, usually less than a few feet and the nest is very close to the open water

	Redhead	Canvasback
Size	smaller and less heavy	larger and heavier
Head Shape	rounded	sloped forehead and bill, triangular
Color	red head and gray back	rusty head and white back
Eye color	yellow	red
Bill color	blue-white-black	gray
Wing color	gray (darker)	white (lighter)
Flight Speed	slower	extremely fast (recorded at 70 mph)
Flight	longer runway to become airborne	shorter runway to become airborne
Landings	plunge from high	gradual sloped
Vocalization	Redheads are not noted for being vocal. Males produce a long wheezing sound like "whee-ough" or a cat like "meow". Females yield a soft "eer" or a louder "squak".	
<i>Note: Most information refers to drakes of the species.</i>		



Drake Redhead - Photo courtesy of Scott Moody

(less than a few meters). Redheads require large wetlands of at least an acre in size and never use areas less than a quarter of an acre. The female does all selection of nest sites and construction. The nest is solidly woven and cupped, sometimes covered with a canopy of overhanging grasses. Adjustment to changing water levels is possible and occasionally a ramp is built from the edge of the nest to water level. Nests are never reused, and a solitary clutching is normal. (Birds of North America: Redhead. Marc Woodin and Thomas C. Michot. pp. 16-17)

Redhead nesting is strongly impacted by nest parasitism. Redheads either 1) lay their own nest and neither nest parasitize nor allow their nest to be parasitized, 2) lay their nest and parasitize other birds nest (intraspecies-other redheads or interspecies-other bird species) or 3) totally parasitize other birds and build no nest. Birds parasitized include canvasbacks, scaup, ring-necked, mallards, pintails gadwalls, widgeons, shovelers, blue and cinnamon teals, ruddies, coot, bitterns, sora rails, and marsh harriers. (Wooden and Michot. Pp. 19-22) Brood parasitism has a strong impact on redheads and canvasbacks. (See insert on Brood Parasitism).

Clutch size is impacted by parasitism but it is thought to be about 7-8 eggs. Incubation period is approximately 24 days. Fledging period is about 45 days or two months.

High mortality of young occurs, and it is difficult for redheads to achieve recruitment population levels to maintain sustainability. Predation by mammals such as striped skunk, mink, and recently expanding numbers of raccoons. Bird predation by black billed magpies and American crows is also very common. (Johnsgard. p.82) Snapping turtles are also key predators to young hatchlings.

Diet: Redheads often feed at night. They enjoy the submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) of shallow water areas. Oftentimes they will just dabble like puddle ducks rather than dive. About 90% of their nutrition comes from vegetation with about 10% of their diet

Brood Parasitism

Brood parasitism is a form of parasitism used by birds, reptiles, and fish. It is an evolved behavioral pattern in which certain animals rely on others to raise their young. The manipulation of the host by the parasitizer can either be of the same species (intra) or different species (inter). The parasitizer attempts to deceive the host by use of eggs which mimic size, shape, and color as closely as possible. The positive outcome for the parasitizer is that the host will raise the young as its own. The strategy relieves the parasitizer of a large investment of time and energy in rearing young.

A coevolution between parasite and host has led to a "war" between them. An example, a parasitizer can lay eggs that have thick shells and incubate faster because of greater yolk mass providing more nutrients for rapid development of the chick. Some parasitizers will even destroy the nest of a host who has rejected their egg or offspring. This has been labeled a "Mafia" type response. Hosts have developed greater nest security to parasites. They also practice more aggressive defense responses against the parasite and can better identify the foreign egg and young, often puncturing the egg or killing the young.

supplemented by animal material. (Ducks, Geese, and Swans of North America. Bellrose. P.234) Favorite vegetation includes submerged grasses, pondweeds, duckweeds, and marsh grasses and seeds. In wintering areas shoal grasses, turtle grass, and other SAVs can be included. Animal matter consumed is caddis flies, midges, water fleas, and pond snails.

Population Status: Over the last 30 years redhead population has fluctuated from a low of about 300,000+ birds in 1963 to a high of 1,500,000 birds in 2015. Present level is at about a million birds (991,000). (Waterfowl Status 2022. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) Redhead numbers have been influenced by historic overhunting, climate change, drought, loss of habitat especially in the prairie pothole region to agriculture, disease, and chemical contamination. The redhead is a beautiful and fascinating species of diving duck. For me, it is one of the more challenging birds to find on my myriad adventures. To those of you who find redheads all the time and in decent numbers, I say congratulations, I envy you. I'm sure we all have our challenging bird nemesis which keeps us hunting and on the prowl. If you happen to be on an outing to the Furnace Bay area of Cecil County and you see and hear a large man jumping for joy and shouting exaltations, it will probably be me and a nearby raft of 25 redheads.

Author's note: Just a few afternoons before I completed this article, I was in the Cecil County Community Park and I saw four redheads. Probably the same four from the Christmas Bird Count on December 30th. Oh well!!

Redheads



Redhead Drake
Earl Blansfield

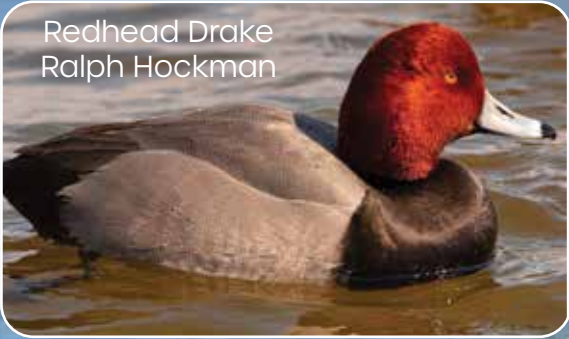
SHOTS From the Wild

**Are you a photography enthusiast who loves snapping pictures of the local wildlife?
If so, submit your shots from the wild to wildlifephotography@decoymuseum.com.
Only high resolution photos will be accepted. (i.e. at least 2,500 pixels wide and 300dpi)**

Redhead Drake
Earl Blansfield



Redhead Drake
Ralph Hockman

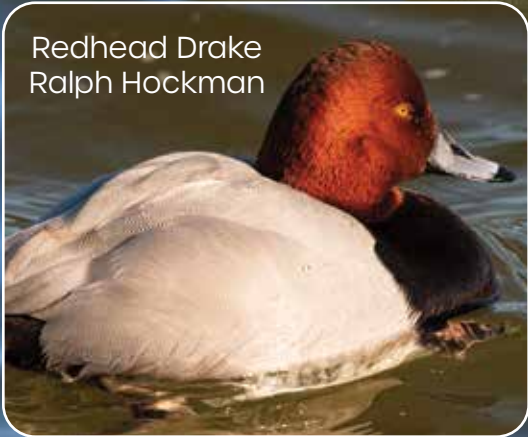


Redhead Drake
Ralph Hockman

Redhead Drake
Scott Krieger



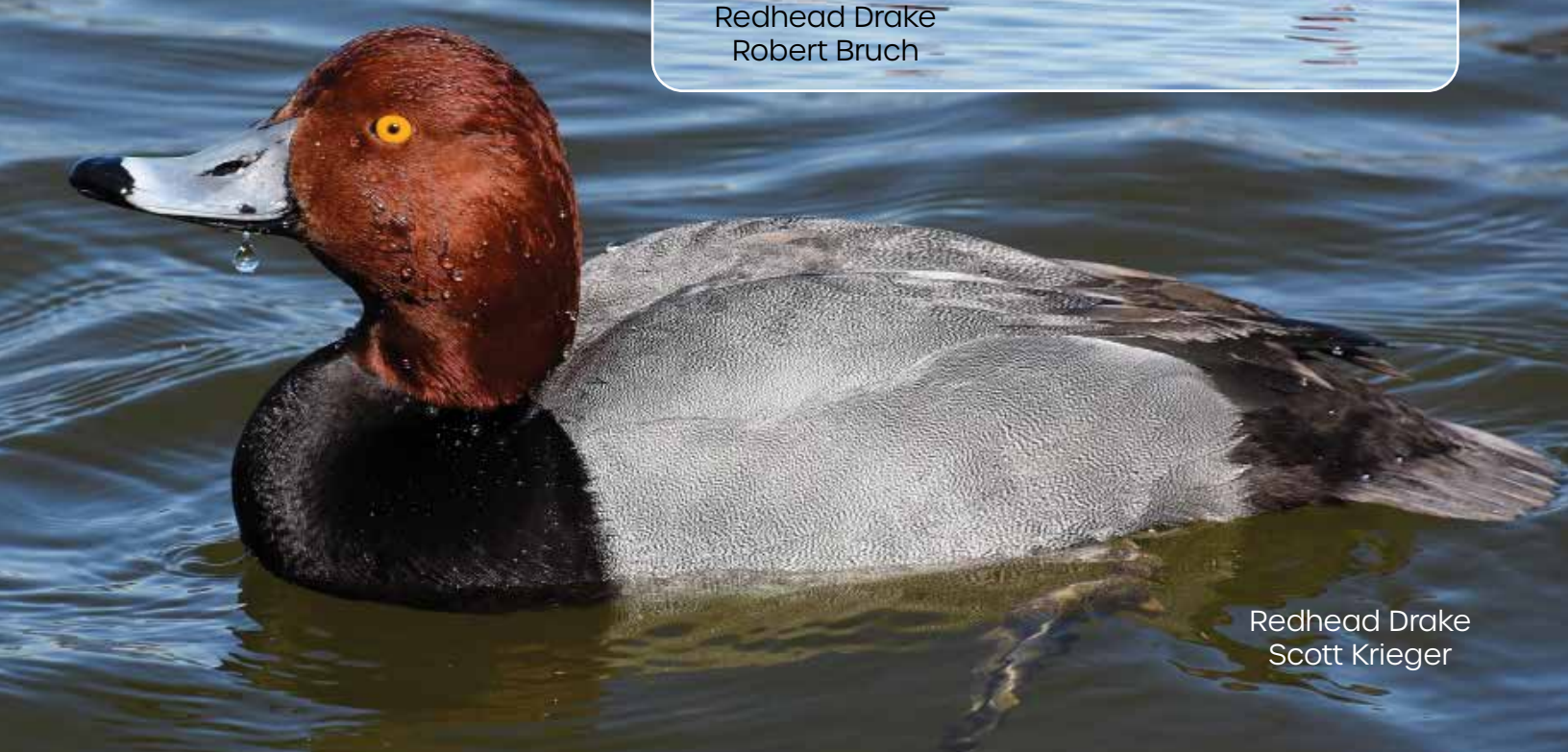
Redhead Drake
Scott Krieger



Redhead Drake
Ralph Hockman



Redhead Drake
Robert Bruch



Redhead Drake
Scott Krieger

Redhead Drake & Hen
Robert Bruch



Redhead Drake
Earl Blansfield



Redhead Drake
Ralph Hockman



Flock of Redheads
Robert Bruch





Decoy Club News

Decoy Club Meeting Features Cecil County Decoys and History - and the Location Couldn't Be Better!

By Chad Tragakis



The Upper Bay Museum in North East, MD served as the venue for the February PDCA Meeting

Members of the PDCA enjoyed a perfect day of decoys and fellowship at the club's February 10 meeting, hosted by our friends at the Upper Bay Museum. The museum, which is located on the banks of the North East River at the very top of the Chesapeake Bay, is housed inside the original H. L. Harvey Company commercial fish house. It is truly a regional treasure and a seemingly endless extravaganza for history buffs, fans of fishing and waterfowling, and of course, decoy collectors.

In addition to our friends from the Upper Bay Museum, PDCA members were delighted to be joined once again by our good friends from the Upper Bay Decoy Collectors Club. It was a great turnout, and everyone in attendance enjoyed a private stroll through the museum, a delicious catered lunch (thank you to club VP David Farrow for coordinating that!) and a chance to catch up with old friends, meet new people and make new friends, and spend lots of time talking ducks

The decoy display contest Theme category for February was Cecil County decoys, in honor of the meeting's location in the heart of a Maryland county known for its waterfowling and decoy making history and lore.

Rob Knight took top honors in the Old Working Decoy category. By a wide margin, members voted for his John Graham blue-winged teal, artfully and appealingly repainted long ago as a diminutive bluebill or



Winners of the Theme Bird category were:

Rob Knight (C)

1st Place with his blue-winged teal by Scott Jackson (Charlestown)

John Henry (R),

2nd Place with his pair of canvasbacks by Henry Lockard (Elk Neck)

David Farrow (L)

3rd Place with his pintail drake by Clarence Webb (Elkton)



blackhead drake. Kevin Peel earned second with a handsome canvasback drake by Joe Dye, exhibiting his classic form. David Farrow rounded out third with an excellent circa 1930s mallard hen by Jim Cockey of Kent Island, an excellent example of a hard-to-find species in all original paint and condition.

In the Contemporary/Decorative category, just four votes separated the day's three winners. First place went to Bill Waibel for one of his own creations — a finely made little miniature canvasback mounted onto a wooden stand, reminiscent of the style Bob McGaw made famous. It is a piece that just left Bill's active workbench a few short weeks ago. John Henry was close behind in second with a sculptural Northern Lapwing made by Onancock, Virginia's Bill Gibian. And just behind John in third place was David Farrow,

with an outstanding black duck he made in 2017. Special congratulations go to David for placing in all three categories!

One neat part of the February meeting was an effort to assist with identifying and informally appraising a large group of decoys brought in by club member Mike Tarquini, president of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum. Mike inherited a collection of about 50 pieces from an old college friend who sadly passed away last year. He was seeking input on the collection in hopes there might be a few things special or noteworthy enough that he could donate them to the museum in his friend's name, for display or use in a future exhibit. This turned into a fun project for the members assembled, who carefully studied, compared, discussed, and were able to identify more than half of the decoys in the group.

There were a few cork body birds and some clunkers mixed in, but most were solid old working decoys, many from the Upper Chesapeake Bay including examples by Sam Barnes, Jim Holly, John Glenn, Taylor Boyd, Bailey Moltz, and Jim Currier. Some could only be partially identified (many were re-headed), and some were obviously old factory birds, but the specific makers remained unknown. For others, the group was able to note a likely region of origin, even when more specifics were elusive. A few of the notables were a wonderful circa 1920 black duck by Charles Birch (1867-1956) of Willis Wharf, Virginia, a terrific John "Daddy" Holly redhead, and a great looking bluebill from the Wildfowler Decoy Company.

To learn more about the PDCA, contact chad.tragakis@gmail.com or visit Potomac Decoy Collectors Association on Facebook.



Upper Bay Decoy Collectors Club Hosts 3rd Annual Decoy Show Honoring Jim Pierce



By Mike Tarquini

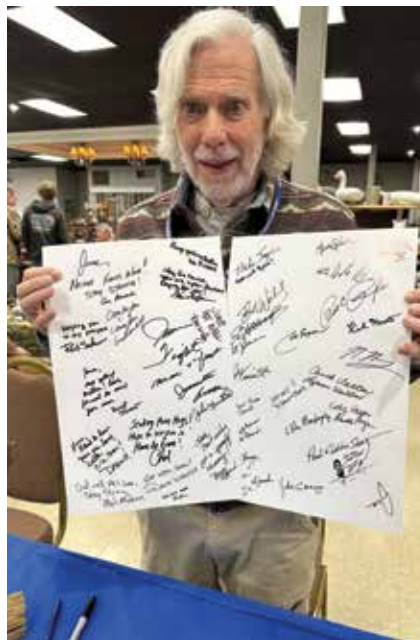
The Upper Bay Decoy Collectors Club hosted the 3rd Annual Decoy Show honoring legendary carver Jim Pierce on Saturday, February 24, 2024 at the Minker Banquet Hall located on the grounds of the Community Fire Company of Perryville (Perryville, MD). Jim, who turns ninety years old this May, is celebrating seventy-six years of making decoys.



There were many contemporary and vintage decoys at this year's show

The event featured forty-five exhibitors who offered vintage and contemporary decoys, artwork, publications, vintage and contemporary fishing gear, and other collectibles. This year's event offered a special exhibit of Clarence Webb decoys presented by members of the Webb family. Jamie Weston showcased a variety of Jim Pierce wood duck decoys for all to admire. In all, there were seventy-six exhibit tables for the crowd of approximately three hundred patrons to peruse.

Gary Armour, President of the Upper Bay Decoy Collectors Club conducted a live auction at the show in an effort to raise additional funds for the club. Items auctioned included a print by Paul Shertz, a poster from the Upper Bay Museum, a replica of a gunning light by Jim Pierce, and a hand crafted decoy by Bruce Eppard.



Michael Daley shares the back of two show posters where exhibitors sent well wishes to his wife June for a speedy recovery from a recent illness

By all measures, the event was a success and provided all those in attendance with ample time to visit all of the exhibitors and enjoy their fellowship as well as catch up with other show attendees. The Ladies Auxiliary of the Community Fire Company of Perryville provided food and drink throughout the event.

The Upper Bay Decoy Collectors Club wishes to acknowledge their sponsors; Riverside Lodge, Bryan & Sons, The Wellwood, Holly Hill Farms, Crow Insurance, Zeb's Auctions, Inc, Maryland Concrete Foundations, Pierce Decoys, Robert Foard, Robinson Decoys, Bruce Eppard, and Chris Worch for supporting the event.

The 4th Annual Upper Bay Decoy Collectors Club Decoy Show will be held on Saturday, February 22, 2025 at the Minker Banquet Hall.



PDCA Holds Annual Banquet in Annapolis

By Mike Tarquini



C. John Sullivan with
Jim Holly Wigeons

The Potomac Decoy Collectors Association (PDCA) held its annual banquet on Sunday, March 3, 2024 at the Annapolis Elks Lodge in Edgewater, MD. Approximately forty club members were in attendance to talk decoys, celebrate club awards, enjoy each other's fellowship while sharing a meal, and raising funds for regional museums and foundations through bidding on auction items.

C. John Sullivan, Jr. began the meeting by stressing the importance of the relationships that he has enjoyed throughout his decoy collecting experience. John recognized the birthdays of two stalwarts within the decoy collecting community: Bobby Richardson and C. A. Porter Hopkins. John also shared the story of his purchase of a decoy once featured in a 1979 edition of Gunner's Paradise Journal. The bird was described as being attributed to Bob McGaw. John purchased the decoy, which was actually a wigeon by Jim Holly. Eventually John ran across a second Holly wigeon and purchased it. He presented both coveted pieces for those in attendance to enjoy.

Jim Van Ness announced those members whose decoys dominated the three traditional categories throughout the PDCA meetings over the past year. The old decoy category saw a tie for first place between David Farrow and Grif Evans. The contemporary class was also a tie between Bill Waibel and Henry Stansbury. The theme bird category was won by Chad Tragakis. The real winners were the entire PDCA membership who had the opportunity to admire all the entries throughout the year.

The highlight of the formal presentations was the awarding of the Ralph Campbell Award. This year's winner was Kevin Peel. Chad Tragakis presented the award and shared Kevin's accomplishments that led up to his being selected as this year's recipient. Kevin spent twenty years in the US Army serving in both Afghanistan and Iraq. His love of history has allowed him to become a recognized authority on vintage decoys, which includes his extensive knowledge of John "Daddy" Holly, the pioneer of the Havre de Grace style. As a result of Kevin's efforts,



Kevin Peel receives the
Ralph Campbell Award

the East Coast Decoy Collectors is once again a thriving organization. He also serves as an active member of the Havre de Grace Decoy Museum's Collections Committee.

President Tragakis announced the creation of the Watchgander Award, which recognizes significant contributions to the promotion of decoy history. Havre de Grace Decoy Museum President, Mike Tarquini was selected as the inaugural recipient based on his accomplishments at the museum that includes the implementation of interactive electronic touchscreens, development of numerous out of region artifact exhibits, growth of the Canvasback magazine, and the beautification of the museum grounds which includes outdoor artwork that features full-sized geese and canvasbacks heading toward the famed Susquehanna Flats.

The event concluded with a combination silent / live auction of donated items where proceeds will fund PDCA donations to the Upper Bay Museum, Havre de Grace Decoy Museum, Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, and the Ward Foundation.

UPCOMING DECOY SHOW INFORMATION

April 6, 2024

**New Jersey Decoy Collectors Association
30th Annual Decoy, Art & Hunting Collectibles Show**

Stockton University – Campus Center
101 Vera King Farris Drive
Galloway, NJ
Info: Jaim Lloyd (609) 703-6143

April 11 -13, 2024

East Coast Decoy Collectors Club Show

St. Michaels Inn • St. Michaels, MD
Info: Kevin Peel (410) 937-2218

May 4 & 5, 2024

42nd Annual Decoy & Wildlife Art Festival

STAR Centre • Havre de Grace, MD
Info: Mike Tarquini (410) 459-8487

June 2, 2024

2024 Annapolis Decoy Show

Annapolis Elks Lodge
2 Pythian Drive • Edgewater, MD
Info: Chad Tragakis (703) 593-3024

September 7, 2024

6th Annual Charlie Joiner Memorial Decoy Show

Galena Volunteer Fire Station
90 East Cross Street • Galena, MD
Info: Allan Schaubert (410) 708-7011

September 14, 2024

5th Annual Delmarva Decoy Show

East New Market, MD
Info: Joe Engers (302) 644-9001



2024 Annapolis Decoy Show

Sponsored by the Potomac Decoy Collectors Association



Sunday, June 2, 2024

9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

**Annapolis Elks Lodge 2 Pythian Drive
Edgewater, Maryland 21037**

Antique Duck Decoys
Contemporary Carvings
Hunting & Fishing Items • Sporting Art
Books • Special Exhibits

Free Admission

Free Parking

Free Identification & Appraisals

Dealer Tables Available: \$50 each
(\$40 each for PDCA Members)

For map and directions, visit:

elks622.com

For details and to reserve your table:

Contact Chad Tragakis

chad.tragakis@gmail.com

(703) 593-3024

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IN ROOMS - RAIN OR SHINE

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ST. MICHAELS, MARYLAND

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(MENTION EVENT)



**SATURDAY LATE AFTERNOON/EVENING
MEETING + COOKOUT**

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

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