

A shell of a cause

Save the Great South Bay hosts annual Oyster Shindig

BY MARIANA OLIVA

Save the Great South Bay held its annual Oyster Shindig on May 2 at Coastal Kitchen on Main Street in Bay Shore. Those in attendance got to support a local nonprofit while enjoying fresh local oysters and drinks. The fundraiser took place from 4:30 to 6 p.m. and was a packed evening.

"This is our second year hosting the event, and we intend to make it an annual tradition

(maybe a few times a year in different locations)," the organization said. "We created it as a way to celebrate our local oyster farmers and raise awareness about the vital role oysters play in the health of the Great South Bay."

Save the Great South Bay conducts a program called Great South Bay Oyster Project, where they restore oysters. Oysters are crucial to marine ecosystems, as some provide barriers from tides and storms. They are filter feeders, meaning they clean water by removing pollutants, improving its quality.

Six hundred oysters were provided by locals Little A's Oysters as well as a live shucking team. Neguntatogue Oysters donated their shucking experience. Both raise and sell Blue Point oysters and were shucking hundreds of them.

On the day, tickets were sold out, with the majority of proceeds going toward Save the Great South Bay. Tickets were sold for \$50, although some decided to make additional donations. Over 100 guests attended the Oyster Shindig, meeting its fundraising goal.

The organization is a nonprofit aimed at restoring the waters of the Great South Bay. They have been around since August 2012 and consist of dedicated baymen, fishermen, paddleboarders, schools, local environmentalists and concerned residents who hope to save the local environment for future generations.

However, just months after being

established as a nonprofit, Hurricane Sandy hit in October 2012. The Great South Bay suffered at the hands of a natural disaster and became polluted. Trees were lost and with any natural disaster, polluted runoff became an issue. This is when contaminants are picked up by rainwater, which in turn threatens the quality of our water supply.

At one of the organization's most recent cleanups as part of their Creek Defender program, 10 tons of trash were collected, all with the help of volunteers who dedicate their time in preserving the waters of the Great South Bay.

Development manager Lauren Gaffary joined the nonprofit months ago, but spent most of her childhood in the Great South Bay. She works to protect a place that has felt like home.

"The Great South Bay has shaped who I am and I find a sincere sense of peace, purpose, and inspiration from it," Gaffary said. "Now, dedicating my career to protecting it feels like a full-circle moment, ensuring that future generations can experience the same connection to this special place that I've been lucky to have and enjoy."

Those interested in supporting Save the Great South Bay, can head to www.savethegreatsouthbay.org. They have two cleanups scheduled for May 10 and 17 at the Massapequa Creek and Amityville Woods Creek, respectively.

Additionally, the Oyster Shindig was one of the smaller fundraising events the organization hosts. They will be having their annual Oyster Ball on Sept. 13 from 6 to 10 p.m. It will be held at Gatsby's On the Ocean in Jones Beach.

"Proceeds support our organization and its [many] programs [one being the Great South Bay Oyster Project], especially our oyster sanctuaries," Save the Great South Bay said. "This initiative helps raise baby oysters in the bay, where they naturally filter the water. One oyster can filter up to 50 gallons of water per day!"

The event will feature live music, coastal-inspired cuisine, local oysters and a waterfront venue. Tickets start at \$175 and VIP tickets start at \$275, although additional donations are welcome. They can be purchased on the organization's website. ■



Little A's Oysters provided oysters for the event.



Neguntatogue also shucked oysters for guests to enjoy.



Aside from having health benefits, oysters are crucial to marine ecosystems.



Donna Dragani and Ron Marino, yearlong supporters of the organization.



At the end of the event, the winner for the raffle and 50/50 was announced by (far right) Lauren Gaffary, development manager for Save the Great South Bay.



One lucky raffle winner got to walk away with a Great South Bay-themed basket.

Courtesy photos