

# Impact

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NEWSLETTER

WILLIAM & MARY'S BATTEN SCHOOL OF COASTAL & MARINE SCIENCES | VIRGINIA INSTITUTE OF MARINE SCIENCE

## WILLIAM & MARY'S BATTEN SCHOOL & VIMS UNVEIL NEW CHESAPEAKE BAY HALL

On April 10, students, staff and faculty at William & Mary's Batten School & VIMS joined university leadership and state representatives to celebrate the newest building on the Gloucester Point campus. First envisioned in 2016, Chesapeake Bay Hall serves as a hub for much of the lab-based science driving the institutions' academic, research and advisory missions.

"The addition of this state-of-the-art research facility to our campus marks a milestone in the storied, 85-year history of VIMS," remarked Derek Aday, dean of the Batten School of Coastal & Marine Sciences and director of the

Virginia Institute of Marine Science, during a brief ceremony that also included Virginia Senator Ryan McDougle, Representative Chad Green, W&M Provost Peggy Agouris and W&M Rector Charles E. Poston. "Each of the research areas housed in this building help ensure that we stay squarely focused on and ahead of the challenges faced by coastal communities by providing practical solutions and science-based advice to our policy makers, stakeholders and coastal citizens."

"This remarkable building, along with the new undergraduate degree in coastal and marine sciences, represents the incredible opportunities ahead for both current and future students," Provost Agouris added. "As William & Mary recognizes the Year of the Environment, it's especially fitting to celebrate this space where students and faculty will be immersed in innovative research and transformative learning."



>Tours of the new building featured more than a dozen labs, including that of Assistant Professor Meredith Evans Seeley (left) and her student Liam Green (right). Photo credit: John Wallace.

The ceremony continued with brief remarks by Poston, McDougle and Green. Afterward, participants were welcomed inside the new building for self-guided tours featuring representatives from more than a dozen laboratories.

### ESSENTIAL ADVISORY SERVICES

The Batten School & VIMS are among the world's leading institutions for coastal and marine sciences, due to their vision that research, education and advisory services can work complementarily to advance the academic, economic and environmental interests of Virginia.

"We are appreciative that VIMS recognizes how important it is to take academic and educational research and turn it into something that directly impacts the commonwealth and the business environment," said Senator McDougle.

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>State Senator Ryan McDougle addresses attendees. Also onstage, from left to right: Batten School Dean & VIMS Director Derek Aday, W&M Rector Charles E. Poston, State Delegate Chad Green and W&M Provost Peggy Agouris. Photo credit: John Wallace.

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## STUDY WARNS OF DEADLY FUTURE MARINE HEAT WAVES IN EAST COAST ESTUARIES

A first-of-its-kind study led by the Batten School & VIMS is predicting estuaries along the East Coast of the U.S. will experience marine heat wave conditions up to a third of the year by the end of the century. With estuaries serving as important nursery habitats for nearly 75% of all fish species and supporting more than 54 million jobs, this could have devastating consequences for marine ecosystems as well as the fisheries and communities that depend on them.

Published recently in *Nature Scientific Reports*, the study used long-term monitoring data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) program



>Lead author Ricardo Utzig Nardi (right) conducted the study as part of his master's thesis at the Batten School & VIMS under academic advisor Piero Mazzini (left). Photo credit: John Wallace

to examine conditions in 20 estuaries across the U.S. over the past two decades. The results showed rising frequencies of marine heat waves in East Coast estuaries that, if continued as modeled, could have disastrous ecosystem consequences.

"The Chesapeake Bay, for example, currently experiences marine heat wave conditions approximately 6% of the year (22 days per year), and that is already placing stress on the ecosystem. Our study shows that estuaries across the East Coast could experience these conditions for more than 100 days of the year by 2100," said Batten School & VIMS Assistant Professor Piero Mazzini, coauthor and academic advisor to lead author Ricardo Utzig Nardi. "This research should serve as a warning to policy makers and environmental managers who are charged with protecting these important ecosystems."

The news was better for West Coast estuaries, which did not show significant warming trends and may serve as important future refuges for many species. The researchers hypothesized this was due to persistent wind-driven regional upwelling in the Pacific Ocean, which brings deep, cold water up to the surface.

Most research on marine heat waves focuses on larger areas of open ocean, where satellites are able to provide long-term thermal data, or on individual estuaries. "Our study is the first to paint a picture of the effect of climatic variability influencing marine heat waves

in estuaries across the nation, and it would not have been possible without the long-term data provided by NOAA's NERR monitoring system," said Nardi, who pursued the research as part of his master's thesis at the Batten School & VIMS.

The study also showed connections between large-scale climate patterns, such as El Niño and Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO), in modulating marine heat waves, especially in West Coast estuaries where positive phases can more than double occurrences. And while estuaries are typically considered to be interdependent, the researchers found strong relationships between estuaries within similar geographic regions. This finding points to atmospheric heat exchange as the dominant driver of the heat waves.

This study builds on past research by the Batten School & VIMS, which was one of the first to document estuarine heat waves in the Chesapeake Bay. As he advances his master's thesis, Nardi plans to study the extent to which estuaries are connected to open-ocean processes.

"We need to carefully quantify all of the factors influencing heat within these systems, including connections between the estuaries, their tributaries and coastal ocean conditions," said Nardi. "These are critical ecosystems and future conservation efforts will depend on our understanding of the factors influencing them."

## JOSHUA BEARMAN M.S. '08 EXEMPLIFIES THE DIVERSITY OF CAREER PATHS POSSIBLE AFTER EARNING A DEGREE FROM THE BATTEN SCHOOL & VIMS

The following is a preview of one of the many new alumni profiles recently published on our website:

"I never had a plan necessarily," said Joshua Bearman, remarking on his unconventional educational and career path which has led him into current roles as acting executive director and programs director for a field-based educational nonprofit. "With an advanced degree, you don't have to go into research science or academia, and I saw pretty early on that research and college-level teaching weren't where my passions lay."

A graduate of the Batten School & VIMS, Bearman has woven his interest in science, education and even music into a diverse life story, but continues to lean on lessons learned while earning his M.S. at the Batten School & VIMS. "I'm very much in and around rivers and bays all the time," he said, "and I am constantly reflecting on all the things I learned at VIMS."

To read Joshua Bearman's full alumni profile, as well as profiles of many other fascinating graduates of the Batten School & VIMS, visit [VIMS.edu/academics/alumni-profiles](https://vims.edu/academics/alumni-profiles).



> Joshua Bearman M.S. '08 wrote his thesis while on the road, touring with a bluegrass band. Today, he leads field-based educational programming for students in Richmond, VA. Photo credit: Joshua Bearman.

# MEETING THE MOST PRESSING NEEDS: LYNN DILLON '75 AND JOHN DILLON '75 LEAD BY EXAMPLE WITH THEIR NEW, UNRESTRICTED ENDOWMENT

"Helping at formative or critical times for certain organizations has been very rewarding. Being able to be hands-on, meeting and working with others, seeing the results of what you do, witnessing the benefit over time; there's nothing more inspiring than that."

Lynn Dillon is describing her motivations for giving back to the community and to her alma mater, William & Mary, over the past several decades. In recent years, Lynn, along with her husband, John Dillon, have become especially involved in the Batten School & VIMS, including Lynn's service on the VIMS Foundation (VIMSF) Board. Ahead of their

50th graduation anniversary, the couple decided to create an unrestricted fund to help the Batten School & VIMS meet their most pressing needs.

"I think the real value of the Batten School & VIMS is truly having an impact for coastal communities, through both economic resilience and marine environment sustainability," said Lynn. "When we were first thinking about the gift, we considered some narrow channels of support for specific uses, but the more I learned during [VIMSF] Board meetings, the more I realized the need for unrestricted current dollars was more important." John agreed, "I think VIMS is a hidden jewel, something that has tremendous impact. Creating a fund with broader reach just seemed to make more sense."

The environment has been a lifelong interest for Lynn and, after meeting Batten School Dean & VIMS Director Derek Aday, she said the decision to join the VIMSF Board in 2023 was easy. "I was very flattered, very honored to be involved in the great mission, the operations and the leadership here," she said. "And having the opportunity to help with development and thinking through strategies and engagement really appealed to me."

A retired former senior vice president at Bank



>Lynn Dillon '75 and John Dillon '75 have become passionate advocates for the Batten School & VIMS, evidenced by their recent endowment gift. Photo credit: Lynn Dillon.

One, Lynn now leans on her professional background in banking and corporate finance as the Chair of the VIMSF Board's Development Committee, a group tasked with outreach and engagement with prospective donors. "My career in banking was managing teams of people; we worked with Fortune 500 companies to build meaningful and lasting relationships," she said. "That experience of learning to understand what someone needs, ask questions, realize competitive dynamics; many of those same qualities are in a development role."

The Dillons' unrestricted endowment comes at an exciting time for the Batten School & VIMS, following a recent pair of historic gifts—\$100 million from Jane

Batten HON '17, L.H.D. '19 and \$50 million from Todd Stravitz '82. "The visibility of the whole organization has risen as a result of those two incredible gifts," said Lynn.

However, she continued, "part of our challenge now is that while those gifts are filling some very big needs, they're not meeting the current need for operating cash. Having the flexibility and the access to current funds to use for the highest needs are critical. If you lose any overhead funding, you're not coming close to what you need. So, obviously, we need to continue the momentum and build current-use funds and create sustainability in terms of funding for the Batten School & VIMS."

John echoed those sentiments, pointing back to the importance of unrestricted funds, like their new endowment. "Things change every day," he said. "Unrestricted funds allow VIMS to move in the directions they need to move."

The Dillons are comfortable allowing their funds to be unrestricted because, according to Lynn, "with the clarity of the vision and strategy here, our belief in leadership and management is very high. Knowing that the investments from the Batten and Stravitz gifts will only continue to attract high quality students, researchers and leadership, we have every confidence that unrestricted funding supports everyone in that universe."

Both Lynn and John say that giving back to W&M over the past 50 years has been incredibly rewarding, and they're thrilled to be a part of the transformational new chapter at the Batten School & VIMS. "The leadership of [W&M] President Rowe and of Dean & Director Aday motivates all of us to want to do more," said Lynn. "You just sense the change, the energy, the focus, the commitment to missions that not only serve the students but also support the community and the nation at large. It is an exciting time to be involved."



> At the 2025 Pathfinders Dinner, Lynn Dillon '75 and John Dillon '75 were inducted into the prestigious Pathfinders Society. From left to right: Executive Director of Advancement & the VIMS Foundation Ellen Leverich, Batten School Dean & VIMS Director Derek Aday, Lynn Dillon, John Dillon and VIMS Foundation Board President Rick Hill. Photo credit: Jenny McQueen.



# COOKING UP SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS: THE 32ND ANNUAL CHEFS' SEAFOOD SYMPOSIUM BRIDGES THE GAP BETWEEN SCIENCE AND SEAFOOD

Over 120 chefs, culinary students, seafood industry professionals and researchers recently gathered at the Batten School & VIMS for the 32nd Chefs' Seafood Symposium. Brought together by connected passions, chefs and scientists converged to discuss the latest news and information about seafood science, marine population trends, fisheries issues and cooking techniques.

"You get a bunch of chefs in the room, you should always walk out more knowledgeable," said Martin Clebowicz, vice president of the Virginia Chefs Association (VCA), a co-sponsor of the event, "but when you put chefs and scientists in a room, you should walk out as almost a genius."

The Chefs' Seafood Symposium, an annual initiative, aims to bridge the gap between culinary professionals and marine science by helping attendees make informed seafood choices. The event is co-sponsored by the Virginia Sea Grant Marine Extension Program,

VIMS Marine Advisory Program (MAP) and VCA, the commonwealth's chapter of the American Culinary Federation.

"The Chefs' Seafood Symposium is all about sharing knowledge, learning, networking and helping both aspiring and experienced chefs grow in their careers," said Lisa Lawrence, VIMS MAP marine education program leader and the primary organizer of the symposium. "This year's event featured



>The event concluded with a Q&A panel featuring chef and restaurateur Andrew Voss (left) and chef Simon Elaban (right). Photo credit: Lathan Goumas, Virginia Sea Grant.

a fantastic lineup of speakers and was a great opportunity to highlight the incredible science at the Batten School & VIMS related to local, sustainable seafood."

Clebowicz also praised the symposium for the relevant data it provides. "It's a wealth of information that helps the chefs plan out how they can bring this food to the public," he said. "Once you're a chef, you're a student for life. It was great to see such a great big turnout here of students, but there's always something to learn."

Throughout the day, experts presented a range of topics, including Chesapeake Bay blue crabs, striped bass, channeled whelk, dogfish and other sharks, as well as trends in watermen occupations. These sessions provided attendees with deep insights into marine species' ecological and economic importance, along with actionable takeaways for incorporating

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## *William & Mary's Batten School & VIMS unveil new Chesapeake Bay Hall, continued from page 1*

Construction of the three-story, 68,240-square-foot Chesapeake Bay Hall—adorned with a large map of the Chesapeake Bay on its northern end—was funded by the Commonwealth of Virginia at a cost of \$76 million. The building consolidates and upgrades the laboratories of dozens of researchers in an environment that promotes safety, efficiency and collaboration.

"One of the best things about this building is the way that it is organized. It's going to foster a lot of interdisciplinary engagement that will benefit our translational research and the education of our students," said Professor



>Assistant Director of Outreach and Education Kristen Sharpe shows off Chesapeake Bay Hall's teaching lab during a tour for W&M undergraduates. Photo credit: John Wallace.

Ryan Carnegie, director the Shellfish Pathology Lab, whose staff were testing samples of juvenile oysters traveling into the state for diseases just hours before it hosted tours.

### **TRAINING FUTURE SCIENTISTS**

This fall, the Batten School will welcome its first class of William & Mary undergraduates majoring in coastal and marine sciences. The addition of Chesapeake Bay Hall's cutting-edge research facilities, backed by transformative philanthropic support, will aid in the recruitment of the most promising undergraduate and graduate students dedicated to finding solutions for issues impacting Virginia and beyond.

Liam Green is an MS-bypass student studying under the mentorship of Assistant Professor Meredith Evans Seeley, whose research focuses on the impacts of plastic pollution on marine ecosystems. They were busy providing tours of Seeley's laboratory, which benefits from advanced instruments that can detect and analyze even the smallest samples of plastic found in the environment.

"I feel like a kid in a candy shop, having a brand-new laboratory and



>The vision for Chesapeake Bay Hall began under Emeritus Dean & Director John Wells (left) and was completed under current Dean & Director Derek Aday (right). Photo credit: Stephen Salpukas.

seeing it built from the ground up" said Green, who hopes to pursue a career in environmental research and teaching. "A lot of what we're doing right now is setting up the new equipment that was installed in the lab so that we can build up a reference library for all of the environmental samples we will be collecting this summer."

Chesapeake Bay Hall also incorporates a focus on public outreach and engagement, with a first-floor teaching lab available for hosting groups wishing to learn more about the application of marine and coastal sciences.

# VIRGINIA'S EXPERIENCE WITH MSX AIDS ATLANTIC CANADA'S AQUACULTURE INDUSTRY

The Batten School & VIMS recently hosted a delegation of government officials and aquaculture industry representatives from Atlantic Canada. Alarmed by the discovery of the oyster disease MSX (Multinucleate Sphere X) in the waters around Prince Edward Island (PEI) last July, they came to learn more about the strategies Virginia has employed to manage this serious shellfish disease.

MSX had already been discovered around Nova Scotia in 2002, leading to significant mortality. Batten School & VIMS Professor Ryan Carnegie worked closely with government officials and the local industry during the initial response, making his expertise highly sought-after when the disease emerged in PEI. Additionally, Assistant Professor Jessica Small provided her expertise in genetics and breeding for resistance to MSX as well as another disease called dermo, caused by the parasite *Perkinsus marinus*. In the months following, they participated in workshops, answered queries from privately owned businesses and even appeared in Canadian news coverage of the crisis.

In late 2024, the PEI Aquaculture Alliance, which represents the island's oyster industry, requested to tour the Batten School & VIMS. Small coordinated the visit, which grew to include government officials, fishery managers, scientists and other industry stakeholders. Working with her colleagues in the Shellfish Aquaculture Program, Small developed an agenda that included time with experts at the Batten School & VIMS as well as representatives from regional industry.



>Workgroup participants gather on the pier overlooking the Batten School & VIMS research farm, which serves as a testbed for different methods of oyster aquaculture. Photo credit: John Wallace.



>Participants were particularly interested in touring the Acuff Center for Aquaculture to learn about breeding disease-resistant broodstock for oyster hatcheries. Photo credit: John Wallace.

"PEI is the largest producer of oysters in Eastern Canada. It's a \$24 million industry and we have a small population, so it's quite stressful thinking about the potential impact," said Kim Gill, director of aquaculture for Prince Edward Island. "We've formed close relationships with Drs. Ryan Carnegie and Jessica Small. They have a very unique and community-based approach to research and collaboration with all components of the industry, so we were keen to learn more and perhaps replicate some of it on a smaller scale back home."

The delegation from Atlantic Canada spent their first day touring the Batten School & VIMS Gloucester Point campus and participating in focused discussions with researchers, students and staff. They were also able to speak with officials from the Virginia Marine Resources Commission and visit a local aquaculture farm. Industry visits continued the following day with additional tours of hatchery, nursery, farm and processing operations. Part of the group remained for a third day, visiting the Eastern Shore Lab in Wachapreague, VA, and touring privately owned aquaculture operations in the area.

## VIRGINIA'S STRATEGY FOR OYSTER SURVIVAL

In the U.S., MSX was first discovered in Delaware Bay in 1957. In just a few years, it spread throughout the Chesapeake Bay where it killed 90-95% of infected oysters.

"In the late 1990s, Virginia's oyster industry collapsed due to MSX, dermo and overharvesting. The strategies we implemented in response gave rise to our intensive aquaculture industry and the restoration of wild oysters,"

said Carnegie, who directs the Shellfish Pathology Laboratory at the Batten School & VIMS. "The hope is that PEI will be able to move through this just as successfully as we did, and hopefully faster because they can learn from our experience and have better tools and approaches."

Virginia considered multiple responses, including introducing a non-native oyster species. Ultimately, the state opted to pursue a combination of innovative fishery management, habitat restoration and selective breeding. The Batten School & VIMS were instrumental in these efforts, particularly in providing pathology services to support management of diseases and the breeding of disease-resistant oysters for both aquaculture and the restoration of wild populations. As part of the response, the Aquaculture Genetics and Breeding Technology Center (ABC) was established in 1997 with a primary focus on the development of disease-resistant oyster broodstock.

## CHARTING A PATH FOR PEI

Much of the advice provided to the Canadian workgroup centered on supporting their wild oyster populations while moving as quickly as possible to hatchery production of disease-resistant oyster seed in support of the aquaculture industry. Additional discussions involved fishery management practices, collaborations with local and regional industry and disease testing and surveillance.

"We were very interested in seeing the labs, hatchery and diving into details about the breeding program. Our next steps are planning, monitoring and disease surveillance, so the timing of this trip and the relationships we've formed are really helpful," said Gill. "I want to stress that we're very thankful for everything that everyone at VIMS has done in the past 6-7 months. I've had lots of sleepless nights, but just being able to reach out to people who have gone through this or are going through this is very helpful."

Overall, the collaboration showed the importance of knowledge sharing and the willingness of those in the shellfish aquaculture industry to help one another. By leveraging Virginia's hard-earned lessons, there is hope that PEI can navigate the challenges of MSX to protect its vital oysters.



## STUDY HIGHLIGHTS SUCCESSES OF VIRGINIA'S OYSTER RESTORATION EFFORTS

Virginia has made significant investments in the restoration of oyster reefs in the Chesapeake Bay, and now a study led by the Batten School & VIMS suggests those management practices are literally paying off in the Rappahannock River. The study, recently published in the *Journal of Environmental Management*, was led by Batten School & VIMS Ph.D. student Alexandria Marquardt, who presented the results to the Virginia Marine Resources Commission's (VMRC) Shellfish Management Advisory Committee on February 19.

In addition to supporting local economies, oysters filter the surrounding water removing algae and excess nutrients while clumping together to form large reefs that serve as habitat for many fish and marine animals. Though once abundant, oyster populations in the Chesapeake Bay collapsed in the mid-1980s due to a combination of overfishing and disease. While Virginia Institute of Marine Science has endeavored to increase wild oysters' resistance to virulent pathogens, the VMRC regulates the fishery in Virginia and oversees efforts to restore oyster reefs.

"Oyster restoration typically focuses on shell replenishment, in which oyster shells are spread over existing reefs on which juvenile oysters attach and grow. This was an exciting project, because it was the first to evaluate the benefits of replenishment activities both biologically and for the fishery," said Marquardt, who collaborated



> Spreading oyster shells on top of existing reefs provides new habitat on which juvenile oysters attach and helps maintain the reef's structure after commercial harvests. Photo credit: Alexandria Marquardt.

on the study with faculty and scientists at the Batten School & VIMS and the VMRC. "Oyster reefs located in public fishing grounds are largely not studied, but we saw significant benefits from even modest replenishment. When combined with rotational harvests, the underlying reef structure was maintained and commercial harvests increased."

The study showed that the density of juvenile oysters known as spat increased immediately following shell replenishment while the density of market-sized oysters peaked three years after, reinforcing the VMRC's current 3-year rotational harvest protocol. Spat density, though highly variable, was

highest in years coinciding with higher brown shell volumes, a measurement of reef health that refers to the amount of oysters and shell above the bottom sediment layer. Marine protected areas were shown to have higher market oyster densities and offer protection from commercial fishing for larger oysters, which may provide a valuable spawning function for the fishery.

VMRC began their shell replenishment program in 2000 and implemented rotational harvests in 2007. These practices have resulted in steady increases in brown shell volume throughout the Rappahannock River and increased the likelihood of watermen meeting daily harvest limits. Overall, the study showed that oyster harvests steadily increased with the improvement of the oyster reefs, with market oyster densities increasing substantially since 2018.

Since the 2007-2008 harvest season, more than 500,000 bushels of oysters valued at more than \$24 million were harvested from the Rappahannock River. The VMRC has invested more than \$14 million toward replenishment in the river since 2000.

"It's rewarding to see that science-based management of this fishery is providing benefits for both the environment and local economies," said Marquardt. "I'm thankful for the opportunity to work with the VMRC and contribute to a sustainable oyster industry in Virginia."

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*Cooking up sustainable solutions: The 32nd annual Chefs' Seafood Symposium bridges the gap between science and seafood, continued from page 4*

sustainable seafood into their menus.

"Every time I've attended, I've heard vital, useful information that I still use to this day and pass along to the students that I work with," said Jeff Baird, an instructor at the Culinary Institute of

Virginia who has been attending the symposium since 1999. "My students were so happy that we came, and they were engaged the whole time. It's very specific information for our Virginia waterways, so it's local and it hits home."

The event also appeals to industry representatives who can hear directly from both scientists and chefs about their questions and concerns. "It's definitely a networking opportunity," said Stephanie Pazzaglia, outreach and development manager at J.J. McDonald, a seafood processor and distributor, "but it's also an opportunity for us to understand the information that VIMS is putting out. Today we really saw a lot of great questions come from the chefs, a lot of inquisitive questions about wanting to understand where

their seafood was coming from and how they can access it."

With another successful year concluded, Clebowicz said he's looking forward to continuing VCA's partnership with the Batten School & VIMS. "This is one of the greatest things that I get to attend on a regular basis, just because it's informative and the Virginia Chefs Association has such a great relationship with VIMS. I hope it continues forever."

Lawrence echoed that the Chefs' Seafood Symposium makes an important impact toward ensuring a sustainable and delicious future for seafood lovers in Virginia and beyond. "I can't wait to see—and taste—how attendees bring this valuable, practical information into their education and careers, and onto the plate."



> Several attendees at the Chefs' Seafood Symposium were students from the Culinary Institute of Virginia. Photo credit: Lathan Goumas, Virginia Sea Grant.

# PATHFINDERS CEREMONY CELEBRATES GROWING MOMENTUM AT THE BATTEN SCHOOL & VIMS

Rain poured down but spirits were high on the evening of Friday, April 11 as the Batten School & VIMS celebrated the Pathfinders Dinner at the Freight Shed venue at Yorktown Beach. This annual ceremony commemorates the contributions of the most charitable donors to the Batten School & VIMS.

Following a lively cocktail reception, 80 guests sat down to an elegant dinner and celebrated ten new inductees into the Pathfinders Society, which is bestowed upon those individuals, households and organizations with a lifetime giving of at least \$100,000.

The 2025 inductees to the Pathfinders Society included Jane Batten HON '17, L.H.D. '19; Bentley R. Andrews; Dr. Tim Harvey '79 and Rick Wallace; Taylor Spencer MBA '83 and Martha Spencer; Lynn Dillon '75 and John Dillon '75; and Emeritus Dean & Director John T. Wells and Patsy Wells. The ceremony also paused to thank Susan Maples for her 23 years of service to the Batten School & VIMS, most recently as director of development before her retirement in early 2025.

"This was a remarkable evening that celebrated some of our most generous and consistent supporters," said Batten School Dean & VIMS Director Derek Aday. "It was our honor to recognize these distinguished friends and publicly mark the growing momentum at the Batten School & VIMS as we continue to lead in developing science for solutions."

"It was thrilling to meet Dr. Aday and other leaders at VIMS," noted Martha and Taylor Spencer, who recently set up an undergraduate field research endowment in honor of their daughter, Erin Spencer '14, who minored in marine sciences. "We were honored to be with a group of people who all have a passionate commitment to support the Batten School & VIMS in their ongoing work researching the environment."

The keynote speaker for the evening was Grace Molino Ph.D. '25, who at the time was mere weeks away from her dissertation defense. "Private philanthropy is often what makes it possible for graduate students to take their research beyond Virginia," she said. "It empowers students, broadens the renown of the Batten School & VIMS and demonstrates the societally important and fundamental research we are doing. I am incredibly grateful for the support of each and every donor in a time when



>The Pathfinders Dinner paused to honor extraordinary support from Jane Batten HON '17, L.H.D. '19, as well as from Dr. R. Todd Stravitz '82 and the Brunckhorst Foundations. From left to right: Batten School Dean & VIMS Director Derek Aday, Jane Batten, Todd Stravitz and VIMS Foundation Board President Rick Hill. Photo credit: Jenny McQueen.

private philanthropy is critical."

During the program, Aday also presented two Pathfinder Awards, a preeminent donor recognition only bestowed when service and contributions are extraordinary. The recipients were Batten, following her

transformational \$100 million gift, the largest gift in W&M's 331-year history, and Dr. R. Todd Stravitz '82 and the Brunckhorst Foundations, following their historic gift of \$50 million, which will provide full tuition support for undergraduate students pursuing the new bachelor's degree in coastal & marine sciences.

"This is one of the best nights of my life," said Batten as she graciously accepted her award. In fact, appreciation all around the room was mutual. Said the Spencers, "The highlight of the evening for us was meeting Mrs. Batten and Dr. Stravitz, whose transformational gifts solidified the Batten School & VIMS' reputation as one of the premier marine science schools in the country. We hope their generosity will inspire others to support VIMS' critical mission."

Invitees to the annual Pathfinders dinner include donors who have given at least \$5,000 to the Batten School & VIMS in the current fiscal year, have lifetime giving of \$100,000 or more and/or documented an estate plan.

## GENEROUS DONORS AND UNIQUE ROW-A-THON CHALLENGE DRIVE ONE TRIBE ONE DAY SUCCESS

On April 2, the Batten School & VIMS celebrated William & Mary's annual giving day, One Tribe One Day. In commemoration of our 85th anniversary, members of the VIMS Foundation Board set two challenges: 500 donors would unlock \$85,000 in additional contributions for the VIMS Impact Fund, while 85 first-time donors would unlock another \$15,000.

**Over 540 donors contributed to the Batten School & VIMS, raising more than \$195,000 in total to support critical marine science research.**

"Once again the Batten School & VIMS demonstrated the power of collective action through W&M's One Tribe One Day!" said Ellen Leverich, executive director of advancement and the VIMS Foundation. "Hundreds of supporters, including alumni, students, faculty, staff and friends, responded to our challenge and we are so grateful for this generous support."

One key subset of contributors came from the network of VIMS Foundation Board Member Bill Keithler, who asked that supporters pledge to donate a set amount of money for every kilometer he completed on a rowing machine. In just under 13 hours on One Tribe One Day, Keithler completed a 100-kilometer row-a-thon (just over 62 miles) and raised over \$24,000 in commitments from more than 90 people.

If you missed One Tribe One Day, you can still make a difference! All gifts made to the Batten School & VIMS, regardless of the day, support our efforts to keep marine environments and coastal communities vibrant and healthy. To learn more, visit [VIMS.edu/giving](https://vims.edu/giving) or contact Ellen Leverich ([emleverich@wm.edu](mailto:emleverich@wm.edu)).



> William & Mary celebrated One Tribe One Day on the Williamsburg main campus with the annual carnival in the Sunken Garden, featuring snacks, giveaways and inflatable attractions.

W&M's Batten School of Coastal & Marine Sciences  
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P. O. Box 1346  
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[www.vims.edu/impact](http://www.vims.edu/impact)

## 85 YEARS OF COASTAL & MARINE EXCELLENCE

In 1940, the Virginia General Assembly allocated a few thousand dollars to "the laboratory in Yorktown." That single building was the Virginia Fisheries Laboratory (VFL). Today we are William & Mary's Batten School & VIMS. Here are a few other things that have changed over the past 85 years:

**Movement and Growth:** We moved across the York River to Gloucester in 1950. The Batten School & VIMS now have more than 90 buildings across three locations in Gloucester Point, Wachapreague and Topping.

**Leading Expertise:** Today's Batten School & VIMS scientists are global leaders in blue crabs, coastal resilience, dead zones, marine ecology, pollution, bay grasses, global change, disease and immunity, fisheries, aquaculture, modeling and more.

**Economic Impact:** Today, Batten School & VIMS operations generate over \$100 million in total annual economic activity in Virginia. For every dollar invested by the commonwealth,

we produce \$4 for the state economy.

**Unparalleled Education:** Upon opening, the VFL offered classes toward W&M's Master's Program in Aquatic Science. Today the Batten

## UPCOMING BATTEN SCHOOL & VIMS EVENTS

### Campus Tours

Offered throughout the summer

### Marine Science Day

Saturday, May 31, 10am-3pm

### Norfolk Harborfest\*

Friday, June 6 – Sunday, June 8  
Downtown Norfolk Waterfront

### After Hours Lectures

*The National TRAP Program:*

*Tackling derelict fishing gear*

Thursday, July 17, 7pm-8pm

*Celebrating 25 Years of the VIMS*

*Teaching Marsh*

Thursday, August 21, 7pm-8pm

*\*Visit our exhibit at these public events*

### Gloucester Food Truck Frenzy\*

Sunday, July 13, 1pm-5pm  
Old Page Grounds, Highway 17

### Virginia Pawpaw Festival\*

Saturday, August 23, 10am-4pm  
Historic Endview, Newport News

### CBNERR-VA Discovery Lab

*Seafood Farms*

Wednesday, September 17, 6pm-8pm

### Marine Life Day

Saturday, September 20, 12pm-4pm  
Eastern Shore Laboratory, Wachapreague

### Yorktown Wine and Oyster Festival\*

Saturday, October 4 – Sunday, October 5  
Yorktown Waterfront

*All events take place on the Gloucester Point campus, unless otherwise noted.  
Visit [www.vims.edu/events](http://www.vims.edu/events) or call 804.684.7061*

School & VIMS offer Ph.D., M.S. and M.A. degrees. In the fall of 2025, we will welcome our first cohort in the newly established bachelor's program in coastal and marine sciences.