

# WACHAPREAGUE Times

News, information  
& happenings from  
the Flounder  
Capital of the World

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## On to New Horizons

**BOB WILLIAMS HAS DECIDED** that this town council term will be his last.

At 78, he has served for nearly eight years. He says that he had thought, at the last go-round, about not running, but he's worked all along on the sewer project and wanted to see it to its completion.

Williams grew up near Albany, NY. As a youngster, he says, he was in and out of the hospital with asthma, enough so that he was held back in school. Going into the eighth grade, he says, he was 16 - and he told his parents he just wasn't going to do that.

His dad said that that was OK, but if he wasn't going to go to school, he had to get a job. So Williams started working for a milkman.

That guy told him that a good thing to do would be to go into the service, and Bob's imagination lit up. He had always loved airplanes, and saw a chance to be near them by joining the Air Force. But because he didn't have a high-school diploma, the Air Force

wouldn't take him. Unhappy but not crushed, Williams applied for the Navy.

He scored so high on the entrance exam that the Navy recruiter went back to the Air Force recruiter and told him that he should do whatever he needed to do to get Williams into the Air Force.

His first chief warrant officer told Williams he had to go back to school, and worked his schedule so that he could take classes while serving - in Wiesbaden, Germany, which he describes as the best assignment you could get.

Williams married a German woman while he was serving there, and they had two sons. The family then came back to the States, with Williams serving at Langley and Pope, NC, Air Force bases.

He began working as an electrician's apprentice, and when he left the Air Force after more than eight years, began working at NASA Langley in Hampton as an electrician for HVAC

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## Wachapreague Oyster restoration project: complete!

By Libby Bieri

**THE BROAD SALT MARSHES** between Wachapreague and the ocean help decrease the power of waves along the waterfront in high tides and during storms.



A marsh island just seaward of Wachapreague acts as a first line of defense by buffering wind waves in Bradford Bay from reaching the town.

However, aerial photographs have documented significant reduction of the size of the marsh island over the last 30 years. To help strengthen this line of defense against storms and wave action, The Nature Conservancy

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## This & That

**MERIWETHER PAYNE, CAPTAIN** of Seaside Ecotours, says that this year, for the first time in four or five years, there are black skimmers and three species of terns nesting on Cedar Island.

That's why people need to pay special attention to the signs there, pointing out the area where the birds nest. You're asked to stay away from the area the signs mark - to keep the birds and their nests from being damaged or destroyed.

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**Williams**

systems. He stayed for 36 years, moving up the ladder to become the head of work control

He met his wife Tomeka Watkinson when he was living in Newport News. His marriage had broken up, and he had joined a singles group that had ballroom dancing, and that's where they met.

"I used to love my dancing," he says, a little wistfully. "Argentinian tango is my favorite." He says Meka is "a much better dancer" than he is.

After they married, they moved to Wachapreague, eventually to the house where they live now, at the corner of South and Center streets.

That house was built by Tomeka's grandfather. After he and his wife died, Tomeka's parents moved there, and eventually, Bob and Tomeka moved in.

His job on the council began when Missy, a former town clerk, came by during a garage sale and said that the council needed someone, and asked if he would be interested. He said OK, and that was that.

On the council, Williams has done a lot of work with the Federal Emergency Management Agency on drainage and roads, the Hampton Roads Sewer District on the sewer and related issues, and the Virginia Department of Transportation, again on roads and drainage.

He's gotten potholes fixed all over town, he says, and has been responsible for getting VDOT to come and fix four damaged culvert boxes.

The drainage issues are far from resolved, though, and Williams has words of caution.

"People don't really look at the future," he says. "When it comes to sea-level rise, they want to stick their heads in the sand."

As a member of Kiwanis, he's worked with Richie Pulchaski to take care of the cemetery in Powell Park, making repairs, hauling off tree limbs, mowing the grass.

And he is responsible for the speed-detection sign on Main Street. He says that he and another person in town put their own money in to help the town buy the sign and put it up.

It's made a big difference, he says.

"Every time I come into town, if I'm behind a car, I see its brake lights come on."

He has plenty to do once he leaves the town council. He's president of the National Association of Mental Illness for the state, working with the CSB, giving crisis-intervention training to police, EMTs and 911 operators.

He is active in Kiwanis, and he will continue to participate in the town Christmas festivities and decorations.

And, he says, smiling, he's going to spend more time on his flight simulator.

**TNC**

(TNC) and local volunteers have restored 2,000 linear feet of oyster reef along the marsh island with an eye towards habitat creation and maintaining the width of this important marsh.



This 3.5-year reef restoration project used two types of oyster substrates – Oyster Castles and Sandbar Oyster Company's novel Oyster Catcher substrate. These act as a hard surface for oyster larvae to attach and grow on.

Oyster Castles are 35-pound notched concrete blocks designed to latch together to create vertical structures that provide resistance against daily wave energy and that hard surface for larvae to attach and grow on.

Oyster Catcher substrate consists of biodegradable hardscapes composed of plant-fiber cloths with mineral-based binders that are wetted with concrete and formed into different shapes and sizes.

Ten thousand Oyster Castles and 1,600 pieces of Oyster Catcher substrate have been installed, with the help of roughly 160 volunteers, mostly Eastern Shore residents, who logged nearly 2,200 volunteer hours working on the project.

From start to finish, the Wachapreague community was engaged and interested in the project. Residents attended events ranging from an open house at the

Island House with boat rides to the marsh island to a screening of the film "Tides of Change," which features footage of the project and interviews with town locals. Town residents also volunteered to support the project itself.

Now, not only are there more oysters on the seaside filtering the water and providing habitat for fish and crabs, but there is also evidence that the erosion of the marsh island has slowed.

The oyster reefs are protecting the marsh island against erosion from normal wave action while the marsh island is protecting Wachapreague against waves during big storm high tides. So, next time you're having your Sunday dinner at the Island House, you can look out of the window at the marsh island and thank the oyster reefs on the other side for playing a part in defending your home!

Though the project has reached completion, TNC will continue to visit the shoreline to monitor its progress. This effort was completed through a partnership between TNC, the University of Virginia and the Town of Wachapreague with funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the help of dedicated volunteers.

**Libby Bieri is a Marine Restoration Specialist at TNC**

**For more photos, a very cool story map and a link to "Tides of Change," a film about the project, please go to the town website [wachapreague.org](http://wachapreague.org)**

**This & That**

Payne says the skimmers, least terns, common terns and gull-billed terns are keeping company on South Cedar with the usual suspects, American oyster catchers, piping plovers and Wilson's plovers.

She says you can see the skimmers and the terns sitting on their nests from below the high tide line and below the signs - and the birds don't mind you looking.

**MAYOR CHARLES ELLIOTT** has been named a finalist in the 2024 International Singer Songwriter Association awards, in the categories of male vocalist and sound engineer. The awards ceremony takes place Aug. 24, in Atlanta.

**TYLER JONES** of Wachapreague has won the flounder tournament, with a 7 lb., 7 oz. catch! Yay!

**THE WACHAPREAGUE VOLUNTEER** Firemen's Carnival runs from June 19-July 6, Wednesday night through Saturday night each week.

**THE SHORE GIRLS** Flounder Tournament takes place May 31-June 1, from 1 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

The awards banquet is at the Island House, June 2 at 1 p.m. For info, contact Katrina Neal, [nkatr@aol.com](mailto:nkatr@aol.com).

**THE JULY 4 PARADE** is set for 10:30. To participate, email [town@wachapreague.org](mailto:town@wachapreague.org). Leave your name and contact info, and what you're planning.

At 9 a.m., look for David Bright and fellow parachuters to jump to Seaside Park!

**THE GENERAL STORE IS** now open Mondays 8 a.m.-2 p.m., closed on Tuesdays and open Wednesday - Sunday 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.