



Century-old Maggie S. Myers, still working the Delaware Bay, returns home with a day's catch.

# The Maggie Myers'

Painstakingly restored from shipwreck to shipshape

By CA  
Special to

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# The Maggie S. Myers' rescue

Painstakingly restored from shipwreck to shipshape working oyster schooner

By CAROL CHILD  
Special to The News Journal

SMYRNA — An old wooden schooner, hull rotted, lying on her side on the sand by the creek, gutted of her soul: That could have been the fate of the Maggie S. Myers if midstate residents Frank "Thumper" Eicherly IV, a waterman, and his wife, Jean Friend, of Bowers Beach, had not rescued her 10 years ago.

The vessel, which can occasionally be spotted by area residents in the Bowers Beach area, is believed to be the oldest, continuously working oyster schooner under sail in the United States.

"The moment we saw the Maggie, it was love at first sight," Friend said.

"She looks so cool," said Eicherly, its captain. "She's low to the water and dredges by hand. She turns on a song, like a snow goose flying around in the air."

These days, the ship is one of the few that still dredges oysters. However, because of conservation efforts, the amount of oysters she is allowed to take has diminished.

Its owners, while lamenting the old way of life, have been involved in conservation and preservation efforts.

"We're down to 60 bushels from 600 bushels somewhere between five and 10 years ago," Eicherly said.

The couple had planned to use the Maggie for pleasure when they bought her for \$5,000. But when their working boat the Phragmites was crushed by ice while sitting right next to the Maggie at their Bowers Beach dock, they put the oyster schooner to work. They dredged conchs, crabs and the amount of oysters allowed.

"She had holes the size of golf balls," Eicherly recalled. "Once we had 13 pumps to keep afloat. She looked like a fireboat. It took a hundred trips to get the down payment to take her to the rail."

When they had made enough money for the down payment to get her restored, they took her to a boatyard in New Jersey.

The ship was built as a two-masted schooner by Rice Brothers boat builders in Bridgeton, N.J., and has been in commission since 1893.

"Below deck the Maggie had four berths and a wood stove for cooking," Eicherly said. "In the early days when Maggie was working as an oyster schooner, before she was motorized, they would stay out all week. The oysters were piled so high the captain had to close the windows of the wheelhouse so the oysters wouldn't come through. The crew hurried to harvest the oysters by the end of the week so they could take them up to Philadelphia and sell them on Friday to get back home for the weekend to be with their families."

The couple loves telling similar stories. Ultimately, Eicherly and Friend want to use the Maggie Myers to educate the public about the life of the watermen on the bay.

"We want her to become an educational living museum. We want to pass her down as a living archive in Delaware."

## ONLINE:

To see photos of the ship's ongoing restoration, go to [www.flaniganbros.com](http://www.flaniganbros.com).

## ABOUT THE MAGGIE S. MYERS

The 115-year-old Delaware Bay dredge schooner must work to earn her keep. Her owners have taken her out on the bay to tag horseshoe crabs, in addition to dredging for conchs, crabs and oysters. She is listed on the National Historic Register. She is 50 feet long and 18 feet wide. The 24.62-ton schooner can carry her weight in oysters. In 2004, Maggie's mast and sails were restored. In 2007, she received a new bowsprit, the pole that extend forward from the front of the vessel, to which stays for the masts are secured.



# Cover story

[www.news-journal.com](http://www.news-journal.com)

Frank "The Smokey" Eshenly, 74, and his wife, JoAnn, friend of Governor Eshenly, cruise the Atlantic Ocean on their 40-foot boat.



Eshenly and his wife cruise from his historic clubhouse.



Above: Marlene Kowalski, 68, cruises with her husband, Frank, on their 40-foot boat. Left: Rick Jones, 68, cruises with his wife, JoAnn, on their 40-foot boat. The day's catch (not including oysters, crabs and herring).





Elderly unloads oysters from his historic schooner.



Above: Marlene Konevitz unloads coal dredged from a sunken ship. Left: Rich Jones unloads more of the day's catch that includes oysters, conchs and toadfish.



News Journal  
photographs by  
Bob Herbert

