

Tetreault To Speak On Advanced Nitrogen Removal—By Shellfish

[by Alan Pollock](#)

EAST HARWICH — Imagine an ambitious shellfish growing program in Pleasant Bay to raise scallops and oysters, not for personal consumption or commercial sale, but solely to improve the bay's water quality. That wild idea has already been put into practice on Long Island, and might easily be adopted here.

Kim Tetreault, director of the Southold Program in Aquaculture Training (or SPAT, the word for certain larval shellfish) will be the keynote speaker at the annual meeting of the Friends of Pleasant Bay next Thursday night, July 20.

A program of Cornell University, SPAT uses a group of volunteers to tend community "shellfish gardens," where oysters and scallops are raised in containment. In exchange for paying a fee, volunteer gardeners earn the right to harvest half of the mature shellfish, while the other half are returned to the waters.

Author and former Orleans shellfish biologist Sandy Macfarlane said the program has worked elsewhere, including communities in Virginia, where all of the shellfish are released, and none are immediately harvested. Volunteers are still enthusiastic, Macfarlane said.

"Their incentive is to help clean up Chesapeake Bay. They're using shellfish as cleaner-uppers," she said.

Such a program is possible in Pleasant Bay not only because of similar water conditions, but because of the broad base of enthusiastic volunteers already in place around Pleasant Bay. Macfarlane said she envisions shellfish gardening as one method the towns of Chatham, Harwich, Brewster and Orleans can use to reduce the amount of nitrogen loading in the bay.

Most of the effort to reduce nitrogen involves land-based changes, like improvements in wastewater treatment. But it's not too late to address the nitrogen once it enters the estuary, Macfarlane said. Nitrogen in the bay stimulates plankton growth, clouding the water and shading out eelgrass on the bottom. But shellfish feed on plankton, changing some of that nitrogen to a form which is more easily broken down by other biological processes, she said.

For such a program to work here, there must be strong support from

municipal government, Macfarlane said.

“The shellfish officers need to be on board,” she said.

The annual meeting of the Friends of Pleasant Bay will take place July 20 at 7 p.m. at the Wequassett Inn, Route 28, East Harwich. Admission is free and refreshments will be served.

The meeting will also feature presentations by students from Harwich Elementary School, Chatham Middle School and the Cape Cod Lighthouse Charter School, which received grants for marine educational programs.

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