

For more information, contact:

K. Sparrow, 252-305-6094

NCWU Membership & Marketing

NC Seafood Industry Organizations Sponsor 2017 Dinner for NC Legislators

Raleigh, North Carolina - April, 2017 - The governing boards and administration of several major fishing industry and seafood related organizations in North Carolina joined forces to put on a North Carolina Seafood Sampler and Fish Fry on Wednesday, April 5, 2017 for the NC Legislators and their staffs. This is the third consecutive year that the NC seafood industry has put on a dinner for State legislators and staff. Close to 600 people attended despite a day full of rain and threatening skies. Even Governor Roy Cooper and his wife decided to come and enjoy coastal cooking. The organizations sponsoring the event were: North Carolina Watermen United (NCWU); North Carolina Fisheries Association (NCFA); Carteret Catch; Carteret County Fishermen's Association; Ocracoke Working Watermen Association; Ocracoke Fresh; Brunswick Catch; and North Carolina Watermen Foundation. The event was held at Mills Construction Company with the help of company president Fred Mills, who has long been a friend to the NC seafood industry.

The purpose of the dinner is to remind State Legislators how important the seafood industry is to the state, to NC residents, and to the economy of the coastal counties that bring seafood to market. This year, the event introduced some seafood that is not a common staple on most restaurant menus - mullet, catfish, red and black drum. Along with plenty of well known favorites - oysters - steamed and fried; shrimp; clams; scallops; and soft shell crabs. To add to the presentation this year, attendees were greeted at the door with fresh shrimp and crab hors d'oeuvres. Seafood for the dinner was donated by just about every seafood operation up and down the coastal counties. From the Outer Banks that included Wanchese Fish Company, Etheridge Seafood, O'Neal's Sea Harvest, Mattamuskeet Seafood, Newman Seafood, as well as by fishermen Fletcher O'Neal from Ocracoke and Andrew Berry from Manteo. Fresh NC seafood came from as far away as Brunswick County with Locals Seafood in Raleigh collecting a lot of donations at their Raleigh facility.

Jamie Reibel, representing the NCWU Board of Directors felt "there were far more people there than we ever anticipated or hoped for. We hope this translates

into positive support for the industry. We are happy to put a face on an industry that tends to take a beating at times, and this year in particular with the proposed restrictions on shrimping.” This year the event even drew the attention and attendance of several major NC chefs who only use fresh catch at their restaurants. They included Chefs Keith Rhodes, Tom Armstrong, Ricky Moore all from major restaurants in the Raleigh or Wilmington areas. Brent Fulcher, president of the NCFA Board stated “as fishermen, we work hard to make a living on NC waters. It’s hard for any of us to take a day off work to come to Raleigh, but to a man we feel it’s just too important for us to show the State how good our seafood is and how important fishing is to the local, coastal economies as well as the state economy.” Cooking for the event has been done each year by Tom Thumb Catering who brings a group of seasoned men to help him assemble, steam, fry and cook all the seafood that day. This year, there were some special dishes - each prepared by a NC fisherman. Those dishes were Fetcher O’Neal’s Fish Chowder (Ocracoke) and Bradley Styron and Jerry Gaskill’s Clam Chowder (Harkers Island). In fact, O’Neal’s chowder was made by O’Neal on Ocracoke Island; transported by ferry to Hatteras that morning; driven to Raleigh by Ernie Doshier (Board member for OWWA and for NCWU); and heated that night by Tom Thumb showing a true collaboration and dedication to participating in the event. At the end of the evening, no one left hungry and all the seafood brought had been cooked and eaten.

Senator Bill Cook and his legislative assistant Jordan Hennessy were instrumental in setting up the event date and making sure that all state legislators knew of the dinner. Based on the success of the 2015 & 2016 dinner, it was not hard to draw in a big crowd - but the wet weather did make it a challenge. At the end of the night, several staffers indicated that the NC Seafood Sampler and Fish Fry is the best food event that they have had in the last three years.

The event which takes months to plan and execute with a dedicated team from all of the organizations - each tackling part of the dinner and the night’s events. The crowd enjoyed NC fried shrimp, oysters, scallops, clams, soft shell crabs, tuna bites, red drum, black drum, catfish and flounder. A low country boil that featured steamed shrimp was also part of the menu. And for the non-seafood lover, racks of ribs were slow cooked on the grill.

The seafood was donated from all over the coast including B & J Seafood of New Bern, TA Taylor Seafood from Sea Level, Quality Seafood of Harkers Island, Shellfish 2000 from Cedar Point, Crab Point Seafood from Beaufort, Pamlico Packing from Grantsboro, Locals Seafood from Raleigh, Nixon Fishery from Edenton and newcomer, Fresh Catch from Wanchese. Additionally, local companies like Wanchese Fish Company, Etheridge Seafood and O’Neals Sea Harvest all came together to be the

central collection points and donated generously. Other contributors to the event included Buster Nunemaker taking care of a sound system and several people made cash contributions to help pay for this dinner. The list of volunteers at the dinner is extensive with everyone - friends and relatives in the fishing community all being recruited.

Pam Morris, with the Carteret County Fishermen Association said “we all feel it’s critical that people in Raleigh know that commercial fishing brings in an important ‘crop’ for the state. Generations of families up and down the coast have been fishermen and every year it gets harder and harder to make a living on the water. We just don’t want it to be legislated away.”