



Five inducted into Delaware Maritime Hall of Fame
Hall honored its first group in 2007

By Henry J. Evans Jr.

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It hasn't taken long for the Delaware's Maritime Hall of Fame to become a tradition, firmly established as a centerpiece among the panoply of First State maritime traditions.

The Delaware Maritime Hall of Fame inducted its first group of honorees in 2007.

In this, its third year, the hall will honor a commercial waterman, a pioneer in the recreational charter boat fishing industry, a maritime industry entrepreneur, bay and river pilot, and a longshoreman leader. The event will be at 6 p.m., Saturday, Oct. 17, at the Lewes Yacht Club.

Each individual is being honored for contributing his skills, energy, heart and time to Delaware's maritime heritage.

The Overfalls Maritime Museum Foundation conceived the hall of fame and sponsors the induction ceremony.

Last year, tickets for the induction ceremony sold out and Ruby Schaeffer, cochairwoman of the hall's selection committee, said the event is very likely to sell out this year as well.

As with previous induction honorees, family members or a representative will receive a hall of fame trophy, a stained-glass art piece designed and made by Connie Ballato, a Lewes-based glass artist.

Inductees to be honored Frank “Thumper” Eicherly IV of Bowers Beach is a commercial waterman and horseshoe crab conservator. He pioneered bait-bag use in the horseshoe crab fishery. Eicherly’s bait bag is polyethylene mesh, which protects horseshoe crab bait from scavengers. The bags extend the number of tidal cycles horseshoe crab bait can be used. He found that using smaller pieces of the crab for commercial fishing bait reduced horseshoe crab use by 85 percent.

Although Eicherly could have kept his methods a secret, he shared them with other watermen in the interest of conserving horseshoe crabs. Capt. Eicherly has also developed a way to use horseshoe crab blood, which is also harvested for medical purposes, to completely eliminate a need to use crabs for bait. By injecting the crab’s blood into other baitfish, Eicherly has proven the method to be as successful as using crab segments to catch conch. In 2002, the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control honored Eicherly for his assistance in education about a waterman’s way of life and his innovative efforts to reduce the number of horseshoe crabs used by fishermen.

H. Dale Parsons expanded the head-boat fishing fleet in Lewes and was among the first in the charter-fishing boat business to encourage women and children to fish the Delaware Bay. He also opened the door to women, employing them as mates on his boats, which at the time was rare in the industry. Parsons has been an avid promoter of his community and state and has introduced thousands to fishing and to Delaware’s maritime history. Parsons was 12 years old when his father, Harry “Pappy” Parsons, moved from Philadelphia to Lewes, to establish the family’s charter-fishing business. With Dale by his side, Pappy’s business grew. Dale sailed it in a new direction when he introduced head-boat fishing and, under his direction, the business relocated to Fisherman’s Wharf in Lewes. Today, Parsons’ fleet of boats caters to fishermen, tourists, families and groups seeking fishing adventure and sightseeing cruises. Capt. Parsons has served as a Lewes city councilman and is a former president of the Lewes Chamber of Commerce. He has served on the Delaware Shellfish Advisory Council and is a U.S. Coast Guard-certified captain and Delaware Captains Association member.

Otis H. Smith, deceased, was originally from Amagansett, N.Y. He moved to Lewes after graduating from Brooklyn Law School. In Lewes he continued a tradition set by his father and uncle, establishing himself in the fishing

industry. As founder and president of Fish Products Co., Smith managed one of the first and largest menhaden processing operations in the country. The business helped develop the menhaden industry along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. Smith was highly respected in the national fishing industry, and in 1962 the U.S. Department of the Interior honored him with a conservation award for contributions to the menhaden industry. A civic-minded humanitarian, Smith's interests were wide-ranging. He was elected mayor of Lewes in 1950, an office he held 18 years as he continued to operate the menhaden plant and perform other public duties. Smith contributed to improvements in health, human relations, commerce, industry, education and research in Delaware, the nation and other countries. He was active on the citizens' committee that helped establish the University of Delaware's marine laboratories in 1951. Smith also financed construction of the university's research vessel "Cape Henlopen," and gave the university a 10,000-square-foot building, rent-free, for five years. The Otis H. Smith Laboratory is so named in recognition of Smith's assistance in bringing the University of Delaware's College of Marine Studies and mariculture program to Lewes.

James J. White was born near Lewes where he was inspired to follow his dream and go to sea. His maritime career spans 45 years, during which he worked for Sun Transport Inc. and the Pilots' Association for the Bay & River Delaware. White earned several maritime licenses and worked his way from ordinary seaman to captain with a master's license of unlimited tonnage. He mentored apprentices, dispatched pilots and kept a watchful eye on the safe passage of ships using the latest navigational tracking systems. In 1993, Jim and a partner, Chief Mate Ched Rogan, founded Coastal Launch Service Inc. The company improved services for personnel and ship's supplies for vessels in the Delaware Bay and Atlantic Ocean. White initiated a new direction to Delaware's maritime industry by equipping launches with safety equipment that, at the time, wasn't required by the U.S. Coast Guard. Each launch was equipped with an inflatable life raft and survival suits. This was a huge improvement to the maritime industry and it assured workers of safer conditions. Years later, the U.S. Coast Guard made White's safety equipment a requirement for vessels carrying passengers on the Delaware Bay. Arthur "Skinny" Wilson, deceased, was inducted into the U.S. Armed Forces in 1943. He served tours of duty in France, Germany, the Philippines and the Netherlands. In 1946 Wilson began working at the Port of Wilmington and "Skinny" – as he was called – joined International Longshoremen's Local 1694. He was elected as the local's business agent in 1948.

In 1953 he became the local's first African-American president. During his tenure, Wilson served on several boards including the Maritime Society, Delaware Business and Community Affairs and Layton Home for the Elderly.

Throughout 35 years of leadership and service to Local 1694 and the community, Wilson was an integral part of a team that helped bring the Port of Wilmington to international prominence. He participated in international trade missions that helped convince the international shipping industry of the Port of Wilmington's high productivity and efficient operation.

Wilson's cooperative attitude as a key labor leader was a vital part of the port's continued growth and economic contributions to Delaware. This year the Delaware Maritime Hall of Fame will present the Meritorious Service Award to Timothy J. Delp for his service to country. Delp is a merchant mariner. He lives in Lewes.