2020 Old Time Barnegat Bay Decoy and Gunning Show Will Carry On - In Cyberspace

By: Victoria Ford

2020 Virtual Only
No In Person Events

Visit:
www.oceancountyparks.org



The Ocean County Decoy and Gunning Show is a cherished tradition that normally brings throngs of outdoors enthusiasts to Tuckerton for the weekend-long celebration of all things related to the bayman's heritage.

This year's show – the 38th annual – will take place wholly online, as all public portions have been cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic. The event, as always, is organized by the Ocean County Department of Parks and Recreation with the support of the Ocean County Board of Chosen Freeholders.

"This show is normally a two-day event at Tip Seaman County Park in Tuckerton that attracts thousands of people," explained Ocean County Freeholder Virginia E. Haines, Chairwoman of the Ocean County Department of Parks and Recreation. Instead, "we will bring some of the annual highlights to the public virtually."

An online Decoy Show is something Director of Parks and Recreation Mike Mangum certainly never thought he'd see. He has been a champion of the event from its very inception – back when "our only technology was the PA system on the stage and the skeet thrower."



Bufflehead duck.

Thirty-eight years ago, Mangum explained, "the Decoy Collectors approached us about having a tailgate picnic. Jimmy Allen and I, along with Bud Seaman and Joe Smith, spoke about the

Continued on page 3

Decoy & Gunning Show from page 2



Authentic boat builders and artists.
Photo credit: supplied by O.C. Parks

idea of the county actually running a show. We formed a committee of volunteers, some of whom were affiliated with the Decoy Collectors, NJ Waterfowlers and New Jersey Ducks Unlimited, along with decoy carvers and boat builders.

"The first year was a beautiful sunny day, held entirely at the (Tip Seaman) park," Mangum recalled. "The show was a great success, and after that it exploded and started to grow exponentially.

"We always said it was more than decoys. It was about all the facets of waterfowling on Barnegat Bay: logging cedar, building boats, decoys, calling, guiding, and the stories of the old-timers. Sadly, most of the old-timers who were there at the beginning are now gone."

Traditionally, the festival opens each day with skeet shooting. Competitions in carving, calling, retrieving and boat building fill the day, while music by Pinelands musicians is played at both the park and the nearby Tuckerton Seaport. The show usually attracts about 300 vendors that offer duck calls, sporting artwork, decorative carvings, model boats, guided hunt services, hunting dog supplies, and more.

"Through a series of competitions, exhibits and demonstrations, we are helping to preserve the heritage and traditions of the bay for years to come," Haines said. "The coronavirus will not preclude us from continuing to preserve this history. We hope everyone will join us online this year."

Aug. 1 of this year was the deadline set to decide the fate of this year's show, according to Mangum. "Once it was determined, based on the current rules regarding the COVID, that we could not run the show as we normally would, we sat down and developed ideas of how to do some facets of the show virtually. We recognized many of our carvers already had produced work for this year's show and it would not be fair if they were not judged as intended. In addition, we thought we could utilize some of the video documentation produced over the years regarding the show and the bay."



Decoys at sunrise.

"(Going virtual) allows us to continue to promote and recognize the traditions of the baymen," Haines said. Via social media, "we will bring to the public a great learning experience of the

Continued on page 4

Decoy & Gunning Show from page 3

rich traditions of the men and women who once earned their livelihoods from our local waters and surrounding lands."

Virtual award presentations will take place online. The six contests for 2020 will be:

Barnegat Bay Gunning Decoy Contest – *Traditional*
Barnegat Bay Gunning Decoy Contest – *Contemporary*
Delaware River Gunning Decoy
Traditional Shorebird Decoy
Youth Gunning Decoy - 17 and under
Youth Shorebird Decoy - 17 and under

"The award presentation marks the culmination of every show and highlights the best of the best of the Barnegat Bay traditions," Haines said. "Even though we will not be gathered at the park to present the awards, we will recognize these winners virtually as we honor the heritage and tradition that comes from Barnegat Bay."

Contest rules can be found on the Parks Department's website:
oceancountyparks.org.

Other awards normally presented at the show, including the Hurley Conklin Award, which is bestowed on individuals who have lived their lives in the traditions preserved by the show – always the highlight of the award presentation – will be folded into the 2021 show.

The 2020 Conklin award winners will be announced on the Decoy Show's social media platforms, according to Parks naturalist German Georgieff.

"We didn't want to diminish the significance and reception of their award, so an abbreviated biography for each will be offered for this year, with a more extensive one published in the 2021 show program, which has traditionally served as an archival source of information," he said. "They will be invited to the 2021 show award ceremony, where they will be recognized and awarded their plaques."

Archival videos and photos from past shows will be posted online, Haines said, along with new videos featuring interviews and topics related to decoys and other traditions of regional baymen. "The idea is to give the public an idea of what this show annually entails," she said.

Haines said she anticipates the 2021 Old Time Barnegat Bay Decoy and Gunning Show will be one of the best ever; planning will be underway in the near future.



Decoys on table.