

Andrew Carmines

IT MAY BE A LITTLE ON THE NOSE, BUT IT'S TRUE IN SEVERAL SENSES: ANDREW CARMINES' RESTAURANT, HUDSON'S SEAFOOD HOUSE ON THE DOCKS, WAS BUILT ON OYSTERS.

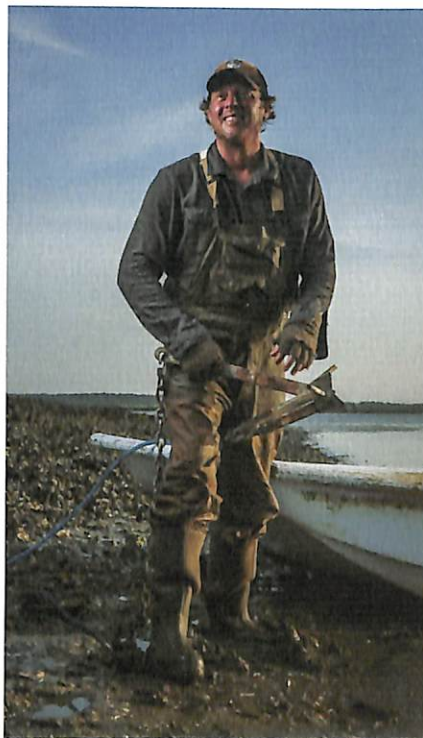
As in, the building itself was quite literally constructed on a bed of oyster shells, meticulously crushed and laid by Benny Hudson one layer at a time by tractor as he turned an old seafood processing plant into one of the island's first restaurants.

But it's also true in the more metaphorical sense, although the oysters are just part of it. By virtue of being surrounded by water and being drenched in a history that valued our area's access to the best seafood, Hudson's was dock-to-table before dock-to-table was invented.

And Andrew, whose parents bought the restaurant from Hudson in 1975, has made that history his own, creating Shell Ring Oyster Company with the goal of making his restaurant the best place to find locally raised cultivated oysters.

"We're looking to grow this oyster venture, because I'm really passionate about that," he said. Already, he's off to a fantastic start.

While he had already leased several spots for harvesting oysters, (Hudson's 3,000 gallons annually), the notion of farming oysters began three years ago. The essential difference between farmed oysters and wild harvested oysters is that, like any other farm, you begin with "seed." These tiny embryonic oysters are placed into bags inside a cage similar to a crab trap, then placed in the



water to grow and thrive. The result is a larger single oyster, more suitable for oysters on the half shell than the clumps of oysters you'll generally see poking out of the water at low tide.

"We put our first seed oysters in the water in May 2015. We harvested around 140,000 oysters the following October, November and December," said Andrew. "I thought at the time, 'wow, this is easy.'"

Not that there haven't been what Andrew refers to as "educational experiences" along the way in the form of lost harvests due to intrusion from wild oysters and buried cages from Hurricane Matthew. But Andrew has persevered and learned even more about oyster farming

in his two years, and is looking to eventually get a hatchery and nursery on-site at the restaurant as well as move his farming operation closer to the restaurant.

Not bad for a guy who only earned an "honorable mention" for his fourth grade science fair project on oysters. "Yeah, that's basically saying, 'you worked really hard,'" he said with a laugh.

If the fourth grade could see him now, they'd realize that his hard work has paired with a lifetime of expertise to create singularly delicious oysters rooted in Andrew's love of our local seafood.

"I love our oysters here. From Nov. 1 to March 15, there's not a better oyster anywhere."

Andrew Carmona

