

Norwalk oysterman opens water quality testing lab

By John Nickerson, CT Post
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Earthplace will celebrate the opening of its new water treatment lab on Edgewater Place in Norwalk on Saturday. Dick Harris, Harbor Watch/ River Watch Director, checks out the new lab's new microscope on Friday, June 12. Interns, volunteers and staffers will use the lab to keep tabs on the water quality in the area. The information will help them to track down sources of bacterial infiltration to keep the waters safe. The lab space was donated by Norm Bloom, of Norm Bloom and Son Oysters & Clams -- his company's shellfish processing facility is on the ground floor, and the lab is on the second floor. Bloom also donated lab furniture and dock space for the group's sample-collection boat. Other major donors to the lab include the Jeniam Foundation of New Canaan and Massachusetts-based Shaw Environmental. Donors to the overall program, which also has a lab at Earthplace in Westport, include the Norwalk Mayor's Water Quality Committee, the New Canaan Community Foundation, and the Fairfield County Community Foundation./ (Shelley Cryan/for the Advocate)

NORWALK -- By opening up a new water testing laboratory at his new oyster house on Edgewater Place in East Norwalk on Saturday, Norm Bloom accomplished something he has been thinking about for 10 years.

Bloom, whose father Norman and uncle Hillard Bloom ran Talmadge Bros., the state's largest oyster harvesting company, said the lab will help keep track of the type and amount of pollutants carried by storm drains into the Norwalk and Saugatuck harbors.

"By knowing what is in the river at all times, we will know what to look for and find out what caused it," Bloom said. "I feel good about this. We have to protect the harbor and the Sound out there for the commercial and recreational fishermen."

The laboratory will be used by the Harbor Watch/River Watch program of Westport-based Earthplace, which since 1986 has measured salt content, oxygen and temperature in the Norwalk Harbor, and later started taking the same measurements in Westport's Saugatuck Harbor and Rowayton's Five Mile River.

Harbor Watch/River Watch Director Dick Harris said the new laboratory, located right off a dock ramp leading to the environmental program's research vessel, Annie, will be a tremendous help to his expanding water testing program.

Harris said this year the program received a \$50,000 state grant to monitor all storm drains into Norwalk and Saugatuck harbors.

"We are going to take bacteria samples and find out what levels of bacteria are getting into the harbors through the storm drain pipes," he said.

As a precaution against damaging run off, and to protect people from getting sick, the state Department of Agriculture and local health department require oyster and clam beds be closed after heavy rains.

The bacteria Harris will be concentrating on is fecal coliform bacteria, which comes from human and animal sewage.

"The problem has been that, over the years, we believe some houses are connected to the storm drains. The sewage/bacteria counts are so high in some storm drains that the only conclusion is that we have is that there are some illegal hookups. Some of these hookups people probably don't even know about," Harris said.

He said that there were four such storm drains in Norwalk Harbor and three upstream in the Norwalk River and one troubling storm drain in the Saugatuck Harbor.

In addition to the grant from the state Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Aquaculture, Harris said they also received other grants from New Canaan-based Jeniam Foundation to furnish and equip the new laboratory.

Harris said the laboratory location is key because water tests have to take place soon after the samples are taken.

Harris also thanked Bloom, who has taken Earthplace students aboard the oyster boats he has skippered since the 1980s. "He is an oyster farmer, who is very concerned about the environment because he sees it as a renewable resource. We like to support him because he is going in the right direction and he has been very good to us, there is no question," Harris said. "We hope by finding these sites and identify the problems, we can lessen the threat of bacteria to his oyster beds."



Earthplace will celebrate the opening of its new water treatment lab on Edgewater Place in Norwalk on Saturday. Peter Fraboni, Associate Director of Earthplace, with hat, and Dick Harris, Harbor Watch/ River Watch Director, check out the new lab equipment on Friday, June 12. Interns, volunteers and staffers will use the lab to keep tabs on the water quality in the area. The information will help them to track down sources of bacterial infiltration to keep the waters safe. The lab space was donated by Norm Bloom, of Norm Bloom and Son Oysters & Clams -- his company's shellfish processing facility is on the ground floor, and the lab is on the second floor. Bloom also donated lab furniture and dock space for the group's sample-collection boat. Other major donors to the lab include the Jeniam Foundation of New Canaan and Massachusetts-based Shaw Environmental. Donors to the overall program, which also has a lab at Earthplace in Westport, include the Norwalk Mayor's Water Quality Committee, the New Canaan Community Foundation, and the Fairfield County Community Foundation. (Shelly Cryan/for the Advocate)

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