

Top awards for CCA from the TOWA Conference in Rockport

John Blaha's feature article took Honorable Mention in the important **Outdoor News Reporting** category.

First Place and 2nd Place for ART and three Honorable mentions for CURRENTS photography and humor columns were awarded to Sam Caldwell.



Habitat Today for Fish Tomorrow.

Highlighting CCA Texas Partners in Conservation: The Impact of the Sink Your Shucks™ Program

By John Blaha, Director of Habitat

The Sink Your Shucks™ oyster shell recycling program was initiated by the Harte Research Institute (HRI) at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and is part of the Coastal Conservation and Restoration Lab. The program stands as a testament to community-driven coastal conservation. Since its inception in 2009, the program has transformed discarded oyster shells into vital components for restoring Texas's oyster reefs, thereby enhancing marine biodiversity, water quality, and shoreline resilience.

CCA Texas has been a proud supporter of this effort for many years, both financially and by encouraging and rallying local volunteers to participate in this consequential effort. CCA Texas's financial support includes a \$152,000 grant spread across two years in 2022, a \$200,000 grant spread across four years in 2024, and a \$10,000 grant secured in partnership with James Avery Artisan Jewelry in 2022 to replace transport trailers.

Founded by Dr. Jennifer Pollack and Corpus Christi restaurateur Brad Lomas, Sink Your Shucks™ was the first program in Texas to reclaim oyster shells from local restaurants and return them to bay waters to form new reefs. This innovative approach addresses the critical need for oyster shell substrate, which is essential for the attachment and growth of juvenile oysters. Without such initiatives, harvested shells often end up in landfills, depriving marine ecosystems of a crucial building material.

As of 2025, the program collaborates with over 15 partner restaurants, 7 oyster farms, and 4 festivals across the Coastal Bend and state, collecting shucked oyster shells that would otherwise be discarded. These shells are transported to a quarantined area provided by the Port of Corpus Christi, where they undergo a natural sanitization process over six months.



The Sink Your Shucks™ events offer all ages the opportunity to participate in conservation efforts. Photo Credit: Kiese and Co.

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Once sanitized, the shells are bagged in biodegradable beehive-shaped bags and distributed to various restoration sites. Community volunteers play a pivotal role in this process, participating in shell-bagging events that contribute to the construction of new oyster reefs. In the recent volunteer bagging events held at Goose Island State Park in May 2025 and over the course of these days, more than 400 passionate volunteers packed 17 tons of sanitized oyster shell into 2,973 biodegradable beehive-shaped bags and "sunk" them into St. Charles Bay.



The Sink Your Shucks™ events also include educational opportunities to discuss the ecosystem and benefits of oyster reefs and their restoration. Photo Credit: Kiese and Co.

As of 2024, Sink Your Shucks™ has collected over 3 million pounds of oyster shells and restored more than 45 acres of oyster reef habitat in the Mission-Aransas Estuary, encompassing Copano, Aransas, and St. Charles Bays. These restored reefs provide essential habitat for various marine species, including fish, crabs, and other organisms, thereby enhancing biodiversity. Additionally, oyster reefs play a crucial role in improving water quality by filtering phytoplankton and excess nutrients, and act as natural barriers that protect shorelines from erosion.



RECUERATION FROM A MIAMI PCA BANQUET will take a while, but the doctor says I'll make it with only mild brain damage. Having that much fun at an event, coupled with fishing the magnificent Florida waters for three days would certainly be a good idea. I had my first contact with Buckeye Bay one afternoon and got a chance to fish the area Floridaans call "Flamingo" for the next couple of days.

I met some fine folk in Florida, and learned that it isn't just Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama who are proud of having the most beautiful of all the Gulf Coast states. I won't say that Floridaans brag about Florida, because it isn't really bragging if you've got it. One of the state's biggest boosters is an ex-patriate Texan. He won't like that tag, but Tony Maeson, a good old Texas boy from San Antonio is a real find of Florida facts and might be turned away at the Texas border if he comes back. Tony attended the Duke Chapter PCA banquet, then had enough energy left to shepherd a few CCA staffers around Buckeye Bay and the flats of the coastal waters of the Everglades National Park. It was in Flamingo that a longtime G.C.C.A. staffer had her first actual experience with a fish as a rod and reel. We were cheering for Tony Maeson in his Shallow Spot, a soccer boat with hand drive that will run across a heavy dew. Bruce Cartwright and I were casting lures lot, hopefully, an early season orofish. Kim Brown, who keeps the CCA National office running through sheer skill and patience with middle-headed staffers like me, was watching, huddled in a weatherproof parka. I had released several small mangrove snappers when something grabbed my gold spoon. I hauled the rod to Kim and said, "Hold this a minute."

"Ouf!" said Kim. "There's something on here!" "Aye, it's probably hooked on the bottom," I said. "Fish, huh..." Maeson and Cartwright were grinning, aware of the joke. Then the reel screamed, the rod bucked and line began to run through the water in an alarming manner. A target jumped clear, shook its gill plates in fury and splashed back into Flamingo Bay. Pard, after twenty-eight years of hard fishing on the Texas Coast I've never caught a target. Imagine the next few minutes as Kim fought her first fish: the advice, the encouragement, the shouts of glee when the silver king left the water. At one point, Kim had the megajaws atlanticus almost close enough for Tony's big net. The line went slack. Can you imagine the condolences that Kim had to suffer? Can the reader imagine that I will ever again hand a rod to Kim Brown?

[Caldwell's CCA art and stories can be visited on his website: Click here.](http://www.samcaldwell.com)

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