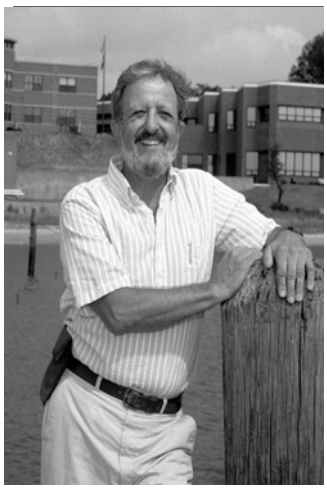
Shellfish Pioneers

Michael Castagna



"Leadership is a hallmark of Michael Castagna. While Mike's 'aw shucks' demeanor might not lead one to conclude he was leading, he did so by example. This leadership quality has always been clearly evident to all who worked with him, and was recognized by his peers. Evidence of this is his enormous efforts on the part of the Atlantic Estuarine Research Society, Estuarine Research Federation and his beloved National Shellfisheries Association."

Excerpt from the Biography of Michael Castagna
By J. Kraeuter and M. Luckenbach *JSR* 22:615-617

Mike Castagna spent most of his extraordinary career at the Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences Eastern Shore Laboratory. When he began working at the field station in Wachapreague, VA in 1962 it was merely a small outpost in an out-of-the-way fishing village. By the time Mike retired in 1992, he had built the laboratory into a first rate field station which served visiting researchers and educators and enjoyed an international reputation as a center of excellence in shellfish culture.

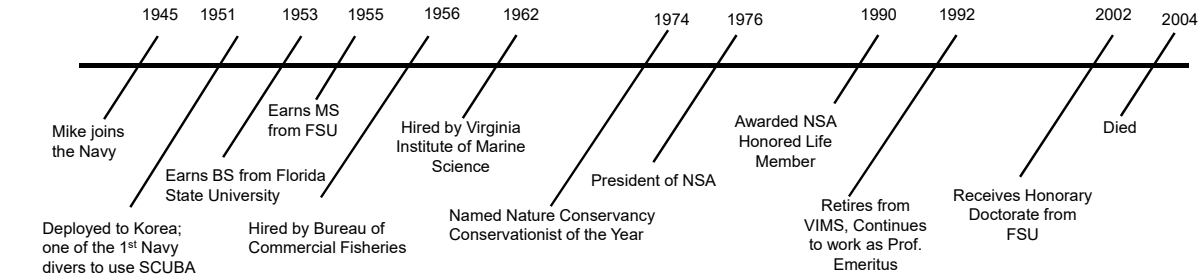
Mike and his staff conducted countless educational field trips for students throughout the mid-Atlantic region. These field trips provided students with critical "hands on" experience in the coastal marshes, lagoons and barrier islands of Virginia's Eastern Shore. These trips were directly linked to his interest in the Nature Conservancy and ultimately the development of the Conservancy's Virginia Coast Reserve.

Mike Castagna (circa 1970) inspecting seawater tables at the Eastern Shore Laboratory.

Mike Castagna and Nancy Lewis examine a bay scallop *Argopectin irradians*.

Mike Castagna is widely recognized as one of the founding fathers of shellfish aquaculture. During his early years at VIMS, commercial watermen would stop by the lab and talk with Mike about their problems, and some of these talks led Mike to begin to develop aquaculture for local species such as bay scallops (*Argopecten irradians*) and hard clam (*Mercenaria mercenaria*). Working in a make-shift hatchery, in which he crafted a heat exchanger from an old whiskey barrel and salvaged tubing, and a nursery in a converted oyster shucking house, Mike and his colleagues spawned and reared through metamorphosis 55 species of mollusks. Under his direction, research at the laboratory paved the way for the development of hard clam and bay scallop aquaculture. Mike brought a unique blend of curiosity, meticulous science and pragmatism to the early development of this field. His emphasis was always on making the culture techniques simple enough that they could be applied directly to those working on the water.

TIMELINE



Poster by