

THE GREAT OUTDOORS



Sunset along the New Jersey Delaware Bayshore in Greenwich, once the site of a thriving caviar industry that surpassed the Russian market. Photo: J. Morton Galetto.

Sunsets and More

Living in South Jersey has us giving thanks for all of our favorite things.

By J. Morton Galetto, CU Maurice River

With Thanksgiving upon us I thought it might be appropriate to share a hodge-podge of some of the things I like best about living in Southern New Jersey – the things I’m thankful for. I suppose some will ring true for you as well.

Home is where the heart is, and having family and friends here is clearly a top reason for my living and loving being here. My home is in Millville but I consider myself a Cumberland County resident who connects strongly to the Bayshore region, I suppose because I live on the water - which is not an accident, but was a quest.

I have been here for just shy of 60 years but I was fortunate enough to grow up, during my first ten years, in a small bedroom community in Bergen County, where my father commuted to New York City. Our neighborhood had hundreds of acres that were called the Alpine, until a golf course stole away the idyllic woodlands. Today it is all mansions that overshadow the little Cape Cod house of my childhood. Every day I’m grateful to have moved to southern New

Jersey. It is the disappearance of “my woods” that was probably the single most important event that impacted my youth and shaped my adult life.

You see, it was never “my woods.” I just thought of them like that, since I played there after school most days. As an adult I came to the understanding that only preserved open space belongs to “the people.” I learned about planning, zoning, and land protection efforts.

I’m proud to have been a key player in what I and others enjoy – clean healthy places to recreate. And I’m happy that our air and water are much better off than many places globally because of our open space.

Our Bayshore Region was selected by the Nature Conservancy - the world’s largest conservation organization with affiliations in all 50 states and 72 countries and 3,600 employees - as being one of the World’s Last Great Places. My point is that they should know. And the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, which protects, by treaty, wetlands on a global scale, selected our Delaware Bayshore Region as a RAMSAR Site.

I’m grateful for the vast connectivity of forests in both Cumberland and Cape May

Counties. This has enabled the greatest state-wide concentrations of threatened and endangered species to exist in our region, attesting to diversity of not only rare but common species, all of which exist interdependently.

Every day we have an endless number of trails to hike for the rejuvenation and delight of our souls. About one-third of Cumberland County is preserved and only about 15% is developed, due to limitations created by soils and by geography in general. The State Recreation Outdoor Plan shows the 2017 breakdown of our county's acres of space to include state parks and forests, Wildlife Management Areas, NJ Natural Lands property, the county park (fairgrounds), municipal parks (Bridgeton Park is a remarkable 1,500 acres– hats off to Bridgeton), and nonprofit preserved space. Cumberland also has nearly 70,000 acres of farmland of which 13,000 is preserved. There we account for nearly 20% of the entire state's agricultural market value. And we rank #1 in growing many fruits and vegetables.



I love seeing the peach and apple trees in bloom. Which leads me to another thing I'm thankful for: farmstands. In our area we have farmers who sell their squash, lettuce, melons, strawberries, pumpkins, corn, potatoes, peaches, apples, and yes, those incomparable Jersey tomatoes.



Western Cumberland County peach trees in bloom, early April. Photo J. Morton Galetto.



Farmstands from the tiniest to the supersized are a favorite of many. Photo: J. Morton Galetto.

I'm grateful for our local waterways: the Cohansey and Maurice and its Wild and Scenic tributaries: the Manumuskin, Menantico, and Muskee Creeks. These rivers have been designated as National Wild and Scenic Rivers, or in the case of the Cohansey eligible for such designation, by the Department of Interior's National Parks Service. This Congressional ratification means that these local rivers are among less than 2% of the most treasured rivers in our nation.

I'm grateful for our rich heritage and the organizations that archive the past: our historical societies. Cumberland County Historical Society is located on Ye Greate Street in Greenwich. Possibly my favorite street in Cumberland County, Ye Greate Street was laid out in 1684 and its course has never been changed. It is much the same today as it appeared 300 years ago, when the British flag flew high over it; the hand of time has hardly touched it. The street is unusually wide for a small colonial town; it abuts the Cohansey River, and remains the first landing reached from the river's mouth. A special thank you to the residents of Greenwich who work so very hard to keep their throughfare amazing!





Top: Some of many homes along Ye Greate Street. Below: Gibbon House is home to the Cumberland County Historical Society on Ye Greate Street in Greenwich. Photo: J. Morton Galetto.

Thank you, Mauricetown, Vineland, and Millville Historical Societies. Millville's 1814 Wood Mansion and 1798 Baracha Dunn House are worthy of a visit. Vineland's Historical and Antiquarian Society is the oldest purpose-build museum in the state! It's a tour you don't want to miss.

The Mauricetown Historical Society's Compton House does an excellent job of showcasing the Maurice River and its people. It houses artifacts like the huge key turned by two men to open the turnstile bridge spanning the river from 1940 until 1972. Just driving through the village and seeing

36 architecturally significant homes is worth a visit. The majority of the village has been placed on the National and New Jersey Register of Historic Places. This December 16th they will hold their annual Candlelight



Albert Reeves (right), the last bridge tender, and Wally Hales open the Pratt Through Truss Swing bridge that once crossed the Maurice River. This bridge's key is on display at the Mauricetown Historic Society's headquarters in Mauricetown. Note the present-day Causeway Bridge in the background. Photo: Library of Congress, Dean and Westbrook.

Let's not forget our iconic East Point Lighthouse and the many people at the Maurice River Historical Society, who strive to interpret a bygone era while battling the Bay. Thank you.

I'm grateful for our seafaring villages of Mauricetown, Greenwich, Fortescue, Bivalve, Dorchester, and Port Norris. The

architecture of Ye Greate Street, of Mauricetown, and of Bridgeton's West Commerce St. are a testimony to pride of place.

I love that we are a bastion for fine arts at the Barn Studio, a center of creativity and home to the Maurice River School of painters. Many of its students have gone on to become well-regarded artists as well as supporters of the arts. Companion to this institution is the Riverfront Renaissance Center for the Arts on High Street in Millville, where regional painters and photographers display and sell their works.

WheatonArts offers a cultural center to explore our glass past and present. It offers a living history, with present-day crafters making use of natural resources to develop their art. I moved here as a child because of my family's connections to the glass industry, so WheatonArts is a special place for me. My first job in high school was as a museum docent, and then as a store clerk. Later I worked summers in the Wheaton factory.



WheatonArts Studio Director Alex Rosenberg demonstrates glassmaking techniques at the TC Wheaton Glassworks at WheatonArts in Millville. Photo: WheatonArts.

The Bayshore Center in Bivalve's shipping sheds and docks are home to New Jersey's Official Tall Ship, the AJ Meerwald, that helps to interpret and preserve our oyster industry's heritage. Oh, yes, and then there are Bivalve Packing's oysters, a sweet slurp of joy.

Please Scroll Down



*Historic shipping sheds at the Bayshore Center in Bivalve.
Photo: Tony Klock.*



Peter Paynter (top photo) brings in a harvest of oysters from the Delaware Bay, Money Island. Photo: J. Morton Galetto.

We have access to live entertainment at the Levoy Theatre, which also engages young

people in the arts and gives them a sense of place and confidence.

I love the solace I find two hours before sunset on the Bayshore. The setting sun's warm glow caps a day beautifully. In a past article I described my favorite places to see sunsets on the Cumberland County Delaware Bayshore, and since then a few couples have told me they have been checking them off one at a time. The way the sunsets dazzle the eyes across our vast salt marshes is spectacular. I will suggest just two bayside spots now: Hansey Creek Road in Dividing Creek and Bayside, Miller/Bayside Rd. in Greenwich, NJ.

I love Union Lake where I learned to fish, sail, canoe, and kayak. I spent endless hours fishing there as a kid. And by the way, from the eastern shore the sunsets are also super; okay, three spots.

I love the endless paths and trails that are available to hike and to watch nature unfold.



Hansey Creek Road hike is part of Egg Island Wildlife Management Area. Below: Maurice River Bluffs Preserve. Photos: J. Morton Galetto.





A trail map marks the Natural Lands Mauricetown preserve trailhead, near Port Norris. CU File Photo.

I'm grateful for the many people that I have met in my avocation working at CU Maurice River. And I'm even more excited to see younger people assume the day-to-day leadership roles at the organization. They are accomplishing more than I ever dreamed possible. If you're not involved, I encourage to you join.

Ultimately we have a lot to be grateful for, yet if we want these local attributes and organizations to remain viable we need to

advocate for them and support them as best we can or they will disappear.

Write and tell me the things you are grateful for and love about our area; email forrivers@comcast.net.

Sources

2018-2022 New Jersey Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan

Influence Watch

Cumberland County Website, cumberlandcountynj.gov