

# in the mainstream

## Meet the Oyster Mama of Long Island Sound

By Cathy Smith

In Rachel Precious' hands, oysters aren't just shuckable edibles. They become ambassadors for coastal conservation and a healthy blue economy.

When Rachel does a raw bar gig, she measures success not by the number of oysters she sells but by the number of people who say, "Wow, I didn't know that about oysters. I didn't know that about water pollution." And even by how many customers end up at the next coastal cleanup.

Rachel founded Precious Oysters, a "tide-to-table" raw bar catering company, in 2019 after working for years on oyster farms in Westport, Norwalk, Stamford and Port Chester. While working for Norm Bloom of Norwalk's Cops Island Oysters, she ran his oyster nursery, thus earning the nickname "Oyster Mama."

Working out on the water every day, Rachel says she had a front row seat to view not only the beauty of Long Island Sound but the ubiquity of garbage and other pollution in its waters. I thought, first of all, it's just not nice having a bunch of garbage in the water around you, but also I realized that the shellfish and aquaculture industries are a big part of the Connecticut economy, a big part of our story, and these shellfish beds are directly impacted by this pollution. Our blue economy – all the commercial and recreational uses of the water – is directly impacted by what we do on land. If you want

healthy oyster beds, you have to have clean water."

That experience led Rachel to start doing river and beach cleanups with the Connecticut Chapter of the Surfrider Foundation and other local groups, including NRWA and Save the Sound. So when she founded her company, it was more than just a commercial enterprise. "The whole point of my company is to get people to care about the ocean and to take care of it," says Rachel. "I use oysters as that connection point. I want people to say, 'Wow these are delicious. Where are they from?' Today Rachel is the Chair of the Surfrider Foundation's  
*Continued on page 2*



*Rachel Precious preparing local oysters for an event.*

## Congratulations to NRWA's 2025 Environmental Hero Award Recipients

### FactSet



### Richard Harris



Left is Joseph Tison of FactSet with NRWA president Louise Washer. FactSet is our first ever Corporate Hero, recognized for donating and planting hundreds of trees in South Norwalk with NRWA. Richard Harris, right, founded Harbor Watch and continues to monitor water quality and work with NRWA through East Norwalk Blue, a non-profit that protects Norwalk Harbor.

## Honor the Oysters

Oysters play a critical role in Long Island Sound's coastal ecosystems, filtering water and creating reefs that serve as habitat for other species. To learn more about them, visit NOAA Fisheries', [Understanding the Health of Long Island Sound's Oyster Beds](#).



Connecticut chapter and a member of Senator Chris Murphy's Long Island Sound Advisory Council. "At Surfrider, we're grassroots activists who work on a community level ultimately to pass legislation. So we'll do things like beach cleanups or movie nights for fun, to engage people and get them interested in our work."

Volunteers help clean up coastal garbage, then Surfrider can convert that garbage into data – how many pounds of litter they collected from Oyster Shell Park in Norwalk in two hours, for example, or how many straws they collected from a single stretch of shoreline. Then they can use both the public interest they've generated and the data to help

support legislation.

"People hear so much about plastic pollution that they almost stop listening. You can't really understand the gravity of things just seeing the numbers or pictures," Rachel adds. "When people get out there and actually see with their own eyes, they say 'Oh my gosh! There are so many plastic bottles out there!' They make that personal connection."

And it's that personal connection that Rachel is after when she's shucking oysters. Her mission: get people to notice, connect, get passionate, act. So the next time you slurp an oyster, beware! You may soon find yourself on a coastal cleanup. ■

## A Lawn Treatment Toxic to Oysters is on the Rise

By Louise Washer

One thing we can all do to protect water quality, and therefore Norwalk's oyster beds, is to avoid using pesticides. Rainwater runoff from lawns containing fertilizers and pesticides is a big source of pollution in the Norwalk River.

A relatively new insecticide, chlorantraniliprole, often sold in a product called Acelepryn, used on gardens and to kill grubs on lawns, poses a special risk to oysters and shrimp. And its use is on the rise unfortunately. New York State, though, has banned it from use on Long Island. We need to protect our coastal waters in Connecticut as well.

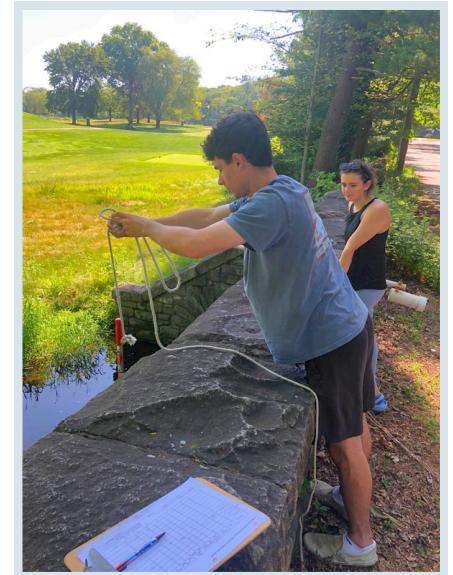
NRWA and partners at UCONN, East Norwalk Blue, and CT Surfrider, tested streams and rivers in southwest Connecticut this summer for chlorantraniliprole and found it present in low concentrations in 66% of the waters tested.

NRWA helps organize a group called CT Pesticide Reform, which is working to introduce state policy to restrict the use of this pesticide, but, in the meantime, it is up to each of us to avoid lawn pesticides entirely or at least to monitor very carefully what goes on our lawns, checking labels for

each chemical and looking them up to learn about how they are affecting non-target species in the environment.

If you have a question about a lawn treatment you are considering using, email us at [info@norwalkriver.org](mailto:info@norwalkriver.org) ■

*Pictured right: Grayson Schottmuller, a recent Boston University Marine Science graduate, and intern Zoe Guerrero, a senior at Ridgefield High School, testing rivers for pesticides and PFAS for East Norwalk Blue and NRWA last summer.*



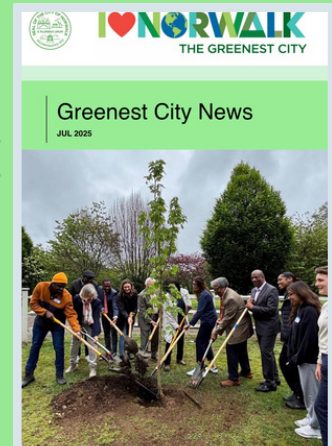
## Help Shape Norwalk's Future

Join the Community Sustainability Task Force

The City of Norwalk is excited to invite residents and businesses to join this volunteer-led advisory group dedicated to supporting the implementation of Norwalk's 2024 Sustainability and Resilience Plan (SRP). Whether your passion is clean energy, thriving neighborhoods, biodiversity, or climate preparedness, this is a place for your voice.

Sign up here:

<https://form.jotform.com/251275610338151>



# Bee-friendly to Pollinators! Turn Out the Lights!

By Susan Vogel

With a flick of a switch you can make life better, safer, longer, and more productive for our pollinator friends!

It's really that easy, and here's how. Outside lights, as we all know, attract insects of all kinds, and this attraction can be deadly, as insects can literally flutter themselves to death.

It also prevents our winged friends from essential activities, such as sleeping, eating, hydrating, and reproducing. Turning off your outside lights before going to bed signals to insects that it's time for them to do the same. Better yet, use motion sensors. Avoiding constant illumination helps pollinators and birds and provides better security by drawing attention to activity.

Other ways to be helpful include:

- Opt for solar outdoor light. The light tends to be softer, so less of an attraction. Because most solar light operates on a timer, the lights turn off during the darkest part of the night.
- When installing new or replacing outdoor fixtures, choose lighting that is directed towards the ground, which avoids having the light spread horizontally.
- Keep parts of your garden and yard in the dark, to provide safe spaces for insects and other wildlife.
- If using LED lights, opt for warm/lower color temperature bulbs, 2200-2700K, as they tend to have less of an impact on insects and wildlife.

## Job Posting!

Our friends at Harbor Watch are seeking to hire two Norwalk residents to serve as Community Leaders for an Urban Waters Initiative. More information about this part-time position at <https://forms.gle/iAjL4CvP416MKww19>

## Ask NRWA

Do you have questions about our monthly emails or newsletter? About water quality or what you can do to help protect clean water and vital wildlife habitats? Submit them to the NRWA Board. Email [info@norwalkriver.org](mailto:info@norwalkriver.org)

## The South Norwalk MicroForest is Planted!



Mayor Rilling and other city officials helped celebrate the opening of the forest on October 7<sup>th</sup> by sharing remarks and helping plant a tree!

NRWA is Hiring! We are looking for two part-time interns to help maintain the forest May-October, 2026

To apply, contact Elise at [outreachcoordinator@norwalkriver.org](mailto:outreachcoordinator@norwalkriver.org)

## Membership Form

Becoming a member helps NRWA continue to protect local water quality, hiking trails, and wildlife habitats.

### Riparian Society

Steward	\$1000+
Protector	\$500 - \$999
Patron	\$100 - \$499

### Membership

Supporter	\$50 - \$99
Friend	\$30 - \$49
Other	\$ _____

☐ My company has a matching gift program (company name) \_\_\_\_\_

### Donate Online at [NorwalkRiver.org](http://NorwalkRiver.org)

Or mail your tax-deductible Annual Membership gift of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to NRWA, Inc. PO Box 7114, Wilton, CT 06897. Please make check payable to NRWA, Inc.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to receive updates and events info. My email is: \_\_\_\_\_

## NRWA is Honored to have Received:

A 2025 Environmental Champion Award from Aquarion Water Company  
The Annual Bob Duff Community Clean Energy Award from  
the Northeast Renewable Energy Coalition

A Certificate of Recognition from the Connecticut League of Conservation Voters for  
advocacy work with CT Pesticide Reform



Special thanks to Aquarion Water Company for the \$5000 award donation! NRWA board members Cathy Smith and Adam Fasciolo (fourth and fifth from left) accepted the award for NRWA.



Connecticut State Senator Bob Duff and NRWA board members Louise Washer, center, and Jes Parker.

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