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WRACK LINES is published twice a year or as resources allow by the Connecticut Sea Grant College Program at the University of Connecticut. Any opinions expressed therein are solely those of the authors.

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Change of address, subscription information, cancellation requests or editorial correspondence should be sent to the address below:

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CTSG-23-06
ISSN 2151-2825 (print)
ISSN 2151-2833 (online)



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From the EDITOR



"Toilers of the Sea," by Rockwell Kent, 1907 Source: Wikimedia Commons

Rockwell Kent painted some of his most iconic images on Monhegan Island in Maine, while living and working there as a lobsterman and carpenter in the early 1900s.

Located 12 nautical miles from the mainland, the island captivated the young artist with its dramatic wave-crashed cliffs, pastoral vistas and the relationship of its people to their chosen place.

There he fell in love with nature and the islanders who made their living amid the harsh beauty and challenges of the cold North Atlantic.

"I envied their strength, their knowledge of their work, their skill in it," he wrote. "I envied them their knowledge of boats and their familiarity with that awesome portion of the infinite, the sea. I envied them their workers' human dignity."

This quote, which first caught my attention a decade ago on a visit to a Maine art museum, came back to mind at the end of April. I was attending a conference in Maine devoted to a means of livelihood that is both ancient and contemporary, that infuses current practitioners and aspirants both with a passion and determination to overcome the hardships of this line of work. There was a strong sense of value in this pursuit—the kind of dignity in one's work that Kent praised.

At the National Seaweed Symposium in Portland, 250 attendees gathered to learn, share, troubleshoot, appreciate and promote all aspects of growing and using seaweed for everything from ingredients in granola bars and beer, fertilizer and animal feed, plastic alternatives and artwork. Keynote speaker Keolani Booth, tribal councilman of the Metlakatla Indian Community in Alaska, told of the central role of seaweed in his culture from pre-Colonial times to the present. Other speakers addressed the economics of seaweed production, the chemistry and biology of food safety considerations, and the global surge in interest in developing this nutritious, environmentally friendly crop through ocean farming.

On the field trip day of the conference, some attendees boarded boats to visit nearby seaweed farms. Others toured Portland's working waterfront. I chose instead a culinary lesson, where chefs in a demonstration kitchen prepared main dishes, teas and dessert using seaweed—all delicious—and asked the group to brainstorm new creations. For me, though, the highlight of the class came at the beginning, when second generation seaweed harvester Seraphina Erhart led a lesson in the types of edible seaweed found on the Maine coast—from kelp to laver to dulse to sea lettuce and more—and showed us the samples she had collected that morning.



Seraphina Erhart shows a ribbon of wild kelp she harvested during a culinary demonstration at the National Seaweed Symposium in Portland, Maine, in April. Photo: Judy Benson

Through typically rough Maine waters and temperatures in the 40s she had guided her boat to the harvesting spot. Though the waves and currents tried to toss her onto the rocks, she managed to cut many different types of seaweed, mindful of how much to leave in place so it regrows. Her parents began Maine Sea Coast Vegetables 50 years ago, and she conveys the same sense of pride in its products and enthusiasm for seaweed that first inspired them.

Now, consider her example as you read about the fishermen, oyster farmers, researchers and scientists in this issue. All of them manifest a unique connection and appreciation of the human relationship to nature in their work. Theirs is a sense of dignity borne of respect for the environment and what it provides, and how we can all do better by it.



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COVER PHOTO: Dylan Redman, left, fisheries biological technician at the NOAA Milford lab, and Isaiyah Mayo, biological science technician at the lab, remove GoPro cameras from an oyster cage on May 18 as part of a project to quantify how fish are using cages as habitat. The data will help industry regulators accurately factor in ecosystem services when deciding whether to grant lease applications. Researchers are also teaching industry members about these services to help them market their products more effectively. Photo: Judy Benson

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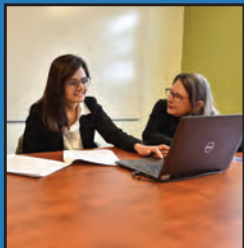
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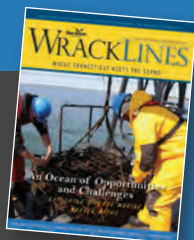
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Bill Hanrahan is a senior editor with Yale New Haven Health, writing about Lawrence + Memorial Hospital in New London and Westerly Hospital in Rhode Island. A UConn graduate, Bill worked for many years at The Day and New Haven Register newspapers, and he's written many freelance pieces over the years. When not writing, Bill and his wife, Ellie, can typically be found gardening or entertaining friends in the field behind their New London home. They are also planning a trip to Italy this fall to celebrate their 60th birthdays.



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Judy Benson has been communications coordinator at Connecticut Sea Grant and editor of *Wrack Lines* since 2017. Before that, she was a newspaper reporter and editor, concluding her journalism career at *The Day* of New London covering health and the environment. She is the author of a book created in collaboration with artist Roxanne Steed: *Earth and Sky: Nature Meditations in Word and Watercolor*, published in 2021 by New London Librarian. She earned both a bachelor's degree in journalism and a Master of Science in natural resources from UConn.

