

PIE CENTER MAKES AN

IMPACT

HEALTHY GULF, HEALTHY COMMUNITIES



# PIE CENTER HELPS COMMUNITY FIND HOPE

**S**hannon Hartsfield grew up in more ways than one on the coast of Franklin County, Florida. The soft-spoken, shy oysterman flourished with the bountiful seafood in Apalachicola Bay. But as a grown man facing trouble in his home waters, UF researchers helped him become the voice of the seafood industry.

Hartsfield, now president of the Franklin County Seafood Workers Association, was fishing in Louisiana when the Deepwater Horizon oil rig caught fire and sank in the Gulf of Mexico. To this day, he feels the impact of the 2010 oil spill, roughly 500 miles away from his home in Apalachicola, Florida.

As millions of gallons of oil seeped across the gulf, Franklin County oystermen harvested as many oysters as possible out of fears the population would be ruined.

Even though no oil or dispersants ever reached Apalachicola Bay, seafood workers noticed in following seasons that the oysters were smaller and not regenerating as well as usual.

The concentrated fishing efforts, combined with a lingering drought and lack of freshwater, were in fact pushing the once vibrant fishery into a collapse, according to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services confirmed in 2012 that oyster populations were dwindling, and the surviving oyster populations were severely stressed.

With his livelihood and community endangered, Hartsfield also noticed that tourists no longer wanted to visit Apalachicola because of the mistaken fear that oil

existed in their seafood.

“The seafood industry will never be where it was before,” Hartsfield said. “We had a major lack of communication and were stressing out because we didn’t know what was going on with each agency.”

To address the issue, a team of university biologists, psychologists, social scientists, governmental regulatory agencies, county Extension faculty and non-profit organizations formed to determine how research could meet the area’s needs. The Healthy Gulf, Healthy Communities team aims to fill gaps within Gulf Coast communities such as public health concerns regarding seafood safety, mental health, social vulnerability and community resilience.

Even though the five-year, \$6.5 million grant project funded by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences formally ends in April, family, youth and community sciences assistant professor Angie B. Lindsey says the


relationships between researchers and community members such as Hartsfield will continue.

Lindsey leads the efforts made by the UF/IFAS Center for Public Issues Education in Agriculture and Natural Resources in the project, and has been involved since 2011 when she was a doctoral student. She helps communicate with researchers and community partners alike to disseminate research results and provide a forum for residents to voice their concerns.

“Even though Healthy Gulf, Healthy Communities is ending, we won’t be leaving the area anytime soon,” she said. “We’ve already got new research projects lined up that capitalize on our collective experiences together. But beyond the research, I’m so grateful for the relationships I’ve formed



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during this research project, and the partnerships will unquestionably last a lifetime.”

### GET SMARRT

The Healthy Gulf, Healthy Communities team inspired Apalachicola’s crabbers, shrimpers, oystermen, fishermen, seafood dealers and others to form their own group to share information and have a role in future decisions about how the bay is managed.

“Even before the fishery failure was declared, the University of Florida was here wondering what they could do to help or assist us,” Hartsfield said. “They’ve helped with a lot of programs and helped us better understand the issues with the local economy.”

The seafood workers recruited another lifelong Apalachicola resident, city administrator Betty Webb, to facilitate their meetings and planning sessions.

The Seafood Management Assistance Resource and Recovery Team, or SMARRT, is a 15-member citizen action group that Webb says helps members effectively communicate with the public and elected officials.

“I saw them at the very beginning where they were kind of withdrawn and they would talk among themselves,” Webb said. “Today, there is no holding back. The leadership that was built through this program was amazing, because I saw a huge difference.”



Webb said the research has been rewarding because it has taught her to value partnerships. In addition to working with Hartsfield on SMARRT, Webb also serves with him on the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint Stakeholders governing board.

Hartsfield said SMARRT gave seafood workers a better understanding of what state agencies were doing and how they made decisions that impact the bay. Now, representatives from those agencies attend SMARRT meetings to ask for input.

Joe Taylor, executive director of the non-profit Franklin’s Promise Coalition, also attends SMARRT meetings and believes the people who make their livelihood from the bay hold the solutions to the issues affecting the industry.

“I think as long as there is a bay that needs to be managed, there needs to be a stakeholder group, and we’re bringing at least 600 years of experience to the table,” he said. “In reality, those guys know more about this bay than almost anybody could.”

### PROMISE FOR THE FUTURE

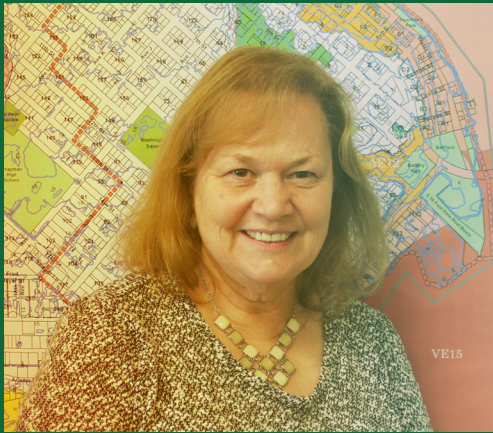
Franklin’s Promise Coalition supports county residents by improving their access to health and nutrition services, education, youth development programs and assistance for substance abuse.

Taylor said Franklin County has always been prepared to respond to natural disasters like hurricanes, but residents and officials never envisioned the potential damage from a man-made disaster like the oil spill. “For good or for bad, we learned a ton from the oil spill recovery,” he said. “We learned a lot about our community. We made new friends and learned how to work together better. We have new relationships as a result of the Healthy Gulf, Healthy Communities project, and I think that we’re actually much stronger.”

Because of his close partnership with Lindsey, Taylor said community leaders were some of the first to hear what their neighbors were saying in the research results.

“She has made a deliberate effort to learn about our community and to be that link between the research projects and our work as the coalition,” Taylor said. “We work specifically to plan and develop community meetings that bridge the science with the community and that’s been extremely beneficial.”





“Working with Healthy Gulf, Healthy Communities has been rewarding and it’s been great for our community. The leadership that has developed through the project over time has been amazing to observe.

– Betty Webb

“Organizations can bring together resources or knowledge but a sustainable solution comes from the community. Healthy Gulf, Healthy Communities helped our community reach that solution.

– Joe Taylor



“Healthy Gulf, Healthy Communities helped us learn how to be leaders of the community, and we’re still working on that. I am so grateful for all that I learned during the past five years of this partnership.

– Shannon Hartsfield



“It has been rewarding to work with the people in Apalachicola in order to help meet the needs of the community. I am so grateful for their partnership and friendship.

– Angie B. Lindsey

