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EMPOWERING OUR PEOPLE

In the last five years, we have made significant investments to enhance the working environment for VIMS' most vital resource — our people.

A New Flagship

The R/V *Virginia* opens new horizons in marine research

On a blustery day in April 2019, VIMS celebrated the christening of its new flagship R/V *Virginia*, built with a \$10 million investment from the Commonwealth of Virginia. Flanked by VIMS Dean and Director John Wells and W&M Rector John Littel, the Commonwealth's First Lady Pam Northam broke the traditional bottle of champagne over the ship's gunwale — ushering in a new era for VIMS research, education, and advisory services. "No other vessel in its size class provides the deck gear, the geophysical capabilities, and the coring capabilities of the *Virginia*," Wells says. "It's got the flexibility to do almost anything on the water that our scientists might want to do, now or in the future."

At 93 feet in length, with a 28-foot beam and 11-foot draft, the *Virginia* can adeptly navigate both offshore waters and the shallow reaches of the Chesapeake Bay. "The *Virginia* provides a much improved platform for our fisheries surveys, which are the foundation for recreational and commercial fisheries management not only in bay waters but for species up and down the East Coast," says Associate Dean of Research and Advisory Services Mark Luckenbach.

Professor Rob Latour spent many weeks last summer and late into the fall on the *Virginia* conducting multispecies fisheries surveys as well as VIMS' renowned shark survey. "The advantages it provides — from enabling us to haul an 8,000-pound load to expanding our footprint out to 1,500 nautical miles — are already having a huge impact on our work."

With greatly expanded haul capacity and deckspace, VIMS' new flagship provides enormous benefits for fisheries surveys.

R/V VIRGINIA SPECS



130-foot Wet Lab
270-foot Dry Lab



Total Berths: 12



Endurance: 10 days
Cruising Speed: 10 knots



Range: 1,500 nautical miles



Stern- and side-mounted cranes for deployment of trawl nets and dredges, scientific buoys and new-generation robotic vehicles



“The boat in its dynamic positioning mode will hold station within half a foot in unbelievable conditions, with 20-25 knot winds. Think of the dividends if you’re coring or deploying navigational equipment. It’s just amazing.”

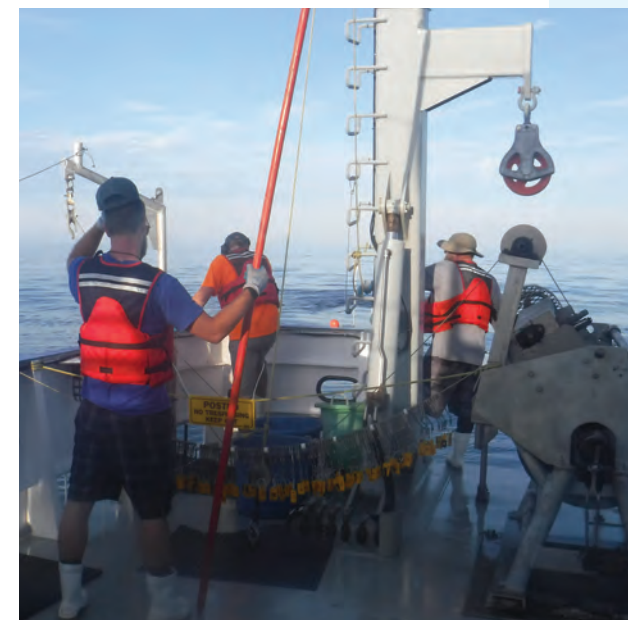


Captain John Olney

John Olney, Jr. first began working in Vessel Operations at VIMS as a 16-year-old, painting bottoms and fueling boats. Today, Olney commands a far different view of the VIMS fleet — at the helm of the R/V *Virginia*.

As captain, he is especially impressed with the ship’s advanced engineering. “We put in a dual propulsion system, where one motor can drive the propulsion while the other drives the hydraulics — operating the large winches we use to pull in ocean trawl,” he says. “To my knowledge, there is not another research vessel in the U.S. designed this way. It allows for a lot of flexibility.”

Olney is a second-generation VIMSer, the son of the late Professor John Olney, Sr. “I’m biased of course, but I always thought of my dad as a unique researcher. He had the rare ability to geek out with colleagues about the evolution of a shad’s rib cage, then turn around and argue with the local farmer about pulling suckers off a corn plant,” he says. “I just wish he’d had the chance to make a trip on the *Virginia*.”



CHALLENGE MET

Last fall, VIMS kicked off a campaign to raise funds to purchase a \$1 million sonar suite for the R/V *Virginia* and match a \$400,000 challenge grant awarded by the Mary Morton Parsons Foundation. The state-of-the-art sonar suite includes a multibeam that creates highly detailed seafloor maps and an echosounder that enables collection of data on marine life anywhere in the water column.

Jeanette McKittrick, VIMS Foundation vice president, made the official campaign kick-off announcement at an evening event in Richmond. The event was held at NewMarket Corporation headquarters, courtesy of council member emeritus and NewMarket CEO Teddy Gotwald. As part of the campaign, the *Virginia* also traveled to Richmond and Alexandria for dockside tours. The vessel’s campaign visit to Norfolk was sacrificed due to COVID-19, but we hope to get her there eventually for tours. Thanks to the generosity of hundreds of supporters, including those who gave through W&M’s Tribefunding platform, VIMS successfully met the Mary Morton Parsons Foundation challenge.



Newly named spaces aboard the vessel will be announced in an upcoming *Impact* newsletter.

BUILDING COMMUNITY

NEW INITIATIVES ENHANCE CAMPUS LIFE



EASTERN SHORE LAB

VIMS' ESL is embarking on a \$17 million campus expansion with six new buildings and a renovated shellfish hatchery. Facilities are purpose-built to protect against sea-level rise.



DONALD W. DAVIS HALL

In 2018, VIMS completed construction on Davis Hall, a 32,000-square-foot facility built with a \$14 million investment from the Commonwealth. The building brings together several key advisory programs under one roof, and is VIMS' first LEED Gold-certified building — with features such as a rain garden and solar shading for energy efficiency.



HEALTHY MINDS

Graduate school puts considerable stress on students, ranging from academic pressure to job market concerns. "There's been growing public acknowledgment that grad students are dealing with increased depression and anxiety," says Linda Schaffner, associate dean for academic studies, who began developing plans several years ago to supplement William & Mary's mental health services by having a counselor on the VIMS campus. Longtime supporter Althea MacWhorter provided essential funding to bring these plans to fruition. "It's been absolutely essential," Schaffner says. "When we do our surveys, students highlight how important it is to have these services on campus."

PURSUING EQUITY

From pop-up socials to panel discussions and more, VIMS' Diversity and Inclusion Committee — better known as Dive-In — has made a big impact on campus. "One focus of Dive-In that best encompasses our work has been Lunch-N-Learn events," says Research Professor Rochelle Seitz, committee chair. "One of our earliest lunches, which had full enrollment, was on supporting LGBTQ+ students and employees. From this, our committee developed a list of barriers and potential solutions." Other lunch topics have included understanding unconscious bias and welcoming the international community. "Through these discussions, we've really come to appreciate what each individual contributes to VIMS' success."

FACILITIES MANAGEMENT BUILDING

The dedication plaque on the new Facilities Management Building pays tribute to the staff's indispensable role in supporting VIMS' mission. "I wanted it to reflect them, as opposed to the building," says Chief Operations Officer Joe Martinez. "I like to call all of our operations members the heartbeat of the community." The much-needed new building opened last fall, and has been especially appreciated as staff members respond to COVID-19. "Where others have been able to work from home, they've been coming to work," Martinez says. "They've been real troopers. I'm really, really proud of them."

The new \$7.5 million Facilities Management Building provides 15,000 square feet of space.

