

# Capt. Greg Shinn

By Amy Kehring

I met (Captain) Greg Shinn back in the spring of 2006, after a sudden departure of our last Captain. I know when I first saw him, I did what a lot of folks do with a new skipjack captain and say “What will Martha think?” Yes, ‘Martha’ is the Skipjack Martha Lewis and she definitely has a will of her own.

Greg told me shortly after he came aboard how it seems it was fate that brought him here to Havre de Grace, and to this historic vessel. It seems his girlfriend encouraged him to find a way to put his Captain’s license back to use, at least part time. So on just the right day, in just the right town, Greg found the Skipjack Martha Lewis. He stopped by the office of the Chesapeake Heritage Conservancy inquiring about any positions he might help fill. He was told to have a seat. So far, he hasn’t left it.

Curious, I asked Greg what made him want to sail and how he got started, because it seems all sailors have that story about when or how “it” happened. Greg’s moment was a bit later in life, when around age 30, he was offered



**ABOVE:** Captain Greg prepares the mainsail.  
**AT LEFT:** Martha dredges oysters under sail.

a vacation in the Bahamas that consisted of time aboard a sailboat. Greg and his then wife decided to take sailing lessons so that they would be more prepared for the trip. Apparently, out on a 15’ Pin-tail on Long Beach Island (NJ), Greg was swept off his feet—by a sailboat. It was that feeling of the sails going up and the wind blowing them full that was his moment.

Greg has been with the skipjack for two full seasons and is preparing for his third. When he first started as the skipjack captain, he spent a lot of time familiarizing himself with the nautical charts in the Havre de Grace area, learning about the ecological and historical mission of the Chesapeake Heritage Conservancy, reading up on skipjack vessels, and watching a visiting skipjack captain dock the boat.

“The most interesting part about captaining a skipjack,” says Captain Greg, “is docking.” Martha is unique in that her engine is not on board, but is in a separate push boat attached to her back end (stern). There is definitely much to be studied when it comes to this aspect of a skipjack, and each captain has his own, often unique, approach.

Along with a lot of year-long maintenance, varnishing, safety checking, and following up on other coast guard regulations, Greg has said his biggest preparation

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**ABOVE:** Greg shows off his 1st place trophy from the Choptank Heritage Skipjack Race last year. **AT TOP:** Freshly shucked oysters after a day's work

requirements for being on board, as Martha's boss, is SPF 50 sunscreen and a floppy hat. I really can't argue...

I've been sailing with Martha for awhile, and I always ask each captain at some point, what their favorite part of being a skipjack captain is. I wasn't going to let Greg off the hook with this one either, and just like him, his answer was interesting.

During our public cruises, Greg always takes a moment on the trip to ask if anyone is interested in learning a bit of history about the boat. He may get a few hands in the air from folks that are new to the area, or new to sailing, and they will likely spend the next ten minutes genuinely interested in the history he tells. Greg says, "At the end, if everyone is silent and listening, and when I am done talking they [passengers] all clap, I feel like I've just won the whole boat." He feels this is a great way to win advocates for what the Conservancy does.

Greg's not your typical captain from what I know. He's tried his hand at various things; working in Atlantic City behind the scenes in theatre, playing guitar, chartering out his own private sailboat for income, living aboard, and even selling cars. While a lot of skipjack captains come from generations of experience

dredging oysters on the Chesapeake Bay, we now have a new generation of captains like Greg who are learning these ways and helping to preserve them for future generations to enjoy and cherish. Not only does this keep one of a vanishing fleet of working sailboats out dotting the shores of Havre de Grace, but it is a living tribute to our bay and to the people that want to make and have made their livelihoods on the water. Through Capt. Greg and the

Skipjack Martha Lewis, the life of the waterman and the preservation of what makes Havre de Grace a unique place to live and visit will continue to thrive.

After living in Pennsylvania, Atlantic City, Key West, and even on his boat, Capt. Greg, his girlfriend Anne, their dog Spencer and a cat named Katie now call Havre de Grace home.

There are several fun ways you can learn more about what the Chesapeake Heritage Conservancy does. You could become a volunteer! Or just find out when the best times are to join Captain Greg out for a sail. Visit their website for lots of details and their schedule. <http://www.skipjackmarthalewis.org>.

**Editor's Note:**

The CHC Inc (Chesapeake Heritage Conservancy) is the parent organization that owns and maintains the Skipjack Martha Lewis offering educational programs, public and private cruises, to preserve this living museum and her history.

Our (CHC Inc) mission is to promote and preserve historic Chesapeake Bay watercraft and to educate the public in the heritage of the Chesapeake Bay. And further, to promote and assist scientific research and to gather scientific information on preserving the plants and animals in the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries.

Their office is located at 121 N. Union Avenue, Suite C, in Havre de Grace (Back of the bldg). The phone number is 410-939-4078.

Amy Kehring is volunteer coordinator and web-master for the Skipjack Martha Lewis. You can visit her personal site at: [www.amy-kehring.com](http://www.amy-kehring.com)

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