



## NEWS

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### **Virginia's Food Festival Obsession Yields World Championship Flavor**

*-Oyster shucking speed demon Deborah Pratt wows foodies at the Urbanna Oyster Festival-*

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(Richmond, Va.) Virginians are passionate about food, especially regional delicacies found only in the Old Dominion. Case in point – oysters fresh from the Rappahannock River, worshipped each year since 1957 at the Urbanna Oyster Festival, in Virginia's Chesapeake Bay region. The festival's highlight – the oyster shucking competition, typically dominated by one little dynamo with a passion for prying.

Deborah Pratt from nearby Jamaica, Virginia has earned her living and hometown hero status by shucking oysters at superhuman speed. Foodies flock to the annual [Urbanna Oyster Festival](#) (November 7-8, 2008) to watch Deborah do her thing. Her superior skill with the bivalves has brought her around the globe as the four-time, oyster shucking champion of the world.

Deborah's passion for speed began at age 15, when her sister taught her how to shuck oysters. She's never looked back since. Deborah talks about life among the shells in her Portraits of Passion [video](#) on Virginia.org.

“Passion to me would be to be proud of yourself, who you are and how did you get from nobody to somebody,” says Pratt as she sits along the Urbanna waterfront. “And how did an oyster - a simple, small oyster, take you around the world?”

Gems like Deborah Pratt are the stars of Virginia's food festivals, numbering in the hundreds statewide throughout the year, and celebrating food finds unique to Virginia.

Sample Virginia's true flavor at the [Taste of Brunswick Festival](#) and World Championship Brunswick Stew cook-off. This event pays homage to the birthplace of the fabled Brunswick Stew, Brunswick County in beautiful Southern Virginia each September.

Discover the allure of wild mountain ramps at the [Whitetop Ramp Festival](#) every May. This festival combines the unforgettable flavor of the wild leeks with authentic arts and crafts, old time mountain music and of course, a ramp eating contest.

Celebrate pure Americana at the [Winchester Apple Harvest Festival](#) each September. In the northern portion of Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, this annual fall celebration determines the state's Apple Butter Making Champion

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and best apple pie baker in the region.

May brings thoughts of summer and the annual Virginia Seafood Festival in Chincoteague on [Virginia's Eastern Shore](#). For over 40 years seafood lovers have headed to the shore's northern tip to indulge in local delicacies and homespun fun at this seaside celebration.

Travelers nuts about nuts know Virginia is peanut heaven. Virginia peanuts take center stage at numerous family festivals throughout the year, most notably at the [Virginia Peanut Festival](#) each September in Emporia and the [Suffolk Peanut Festival](#) in October, complete with a peanut butter sculpture contest.

Ready to dig into Virginia's food festival obsession? Go to [www.Virginia.org/portraits](http://www.Virginia.org/portraits) to get Deborah Pratt's [expert advice](#) on oyster shucking and start planning a trip to Virginia.

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Note to media:

The *Portraits of Passion* series is part of the *Virginia is for Lovers – Live Passionately* campaign. The Virginia Tourism Corporation will highlight Virginians like Deborah Pratt who embody the spirit of Live Passionately. Live Passionately is less about a vacation and more about a lifestyle, with savvy travelers choosing to visit Virginia to live out their passions for wine, music, heritage, outdoor adventure and other fulfilling experiences that make Virginia one of the top destinations in the country.

Video and downloadable images of Deborah Pratt and this feature in Word and PDF format are available for media use at [www.vatravelstories.com](http://www.vatravelstories.com).