

'A feel-good all the way around': P.E.I. oysters raise funds for cancer

'They want to buy the oysters for that reason ... it's a great cause'

By Sara Fraser, [CBC News](#) Posted: Sep 17, 2017 7:00 AM AT Last Updated: Sep 17, 2017 7:00 AM AT

P.E.I. oysters are helping to raise money for cancer research. The oysters are harvested by New London's George Dowdle, whose wife Marlene died from brain cancer in April.

- Province paying more to keep public oyster beds viable, association says

The idea came from celebrity oyster shucker Patrick McMurray and his Ontario wholesaler Seacore Seafood. This spring, they decided to re-brand some boxes of Dowdle's Green Gables brand oysters as "Daffodil" oysters — with \$20 from each box going to the Canadian Cancer Society — after they became aware of Marlene's terminal illness.

'I'm honoured that they wanted to do it, I'm actually pretty dumbfounded by it.' — *George Dowdle*

"Obviously, for a couple weeks we weren't shipping oysters and we had to tell our wholesalers why," explained Dowdle, who fished side by side with his wife for 32 years.

Ten oysters out of every 100-piece box are wrapped with a yellow-and-blue silicone reminder band that says #ShuckCancer on one side and #DaffodilOysters on the other.

"We've got good feedback from customers," said Sal Battaglia, vice-president of marketing at Seacore. "Cancer has affected almost everybody. They want to buy the oysters for that reason ... it's a great cause."

'Brilliant idea'

McMurray, who owns two restaurants in Toronto — Starfish Oyster Bed & Grill and The Ceili Cottage — is also an author and world champion oyster shucker, and works with Seacore as their oyster expert.

He and Battaglia borrowed the idea from the Pink Ribbon Oyster campaign in Long Island, N.Y, which donates 25 per cent of profits to breast cancer research.

When they heard of Marlene's illness, they thought, "Oh my God that's a brilliant idea!" McMurray said — supporting the Dowdles by buying their product, while raising money for and awareness about cancer.

"It's a feel-good all the way around," McMurray said.

'I'm honoured'

Since February, Seacore and McMurray have sold 250 cases of the specially branded oysters, raising \$5,000 for cancer. Their goal is to sell at least 250 more this year, for a total of \$10,000.

The oysters wholesale for \$115 per case, and are "one of the best oysters you can buy on the East Coast," Battaglia enthused.

Dowdle welcomes the support and is proud of the Daffodil-branded product — he was thrilled when his father proudly noticed some in a store in Ontario.

"I'm honoured that they wanted to do it, I'm actually pretty dumbfounded by it all — usually, you don't get someone who wants to help that much," Dowdle said.

"It was never about 'I might sell more oysters.' At least it might help somebody else someday."

'I want her to be remembered'

But Dowdle is still coping the grief of with Marlene's loss.

"We were never apart," he said of his wife, who loved to challenge her husband to harvest the most oysters in a day.

"Your world just comes to a complete halt," he said about hearing the news of her illness last fall. He was by her side daily at the hospital through the winter, he said, until she went home with him in April, dying just as fishing season was about to begin.

To further honour her memory as a force to be reckoned with on the water, Dowdle and his children have just created an award for fastest female oyster shucker, which will be handed out this weekend at the P.E.I. Shellfish Festival.

\$1,000 prize

The prize includes a trophy and \$1,000, donated with money from Marlene's life insurance, Dowdle said.

"I want her to be remembered," Dowdle said, adding he wants "women to be more recognized in the industry for the contributions and roles that they do play, which are largely ignored."

"They play a very big role in aquaculture and fishing," he said.

Find more information on the Marlene Dowdle Memorial shucking tournament at marlenememorial.ca.

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