



Submitted photo by Alanna Shea

Gorgeous weather and an amazing crowd made the 2015 edition of the Long Beach Razor Clam Festival one of the best ever. Above, entertainers included the North Coast Blues Band with the Cosmic Bombshells dancing on stage.



Chef Michael Lalewicz grips the First Place trophy won by The Depot Restaurant at the 2015 Long Beach Razor Clam Festival's Clam Chowder Taste-off. Standing with him are Depot co-owner Nancy Gorche and festival organizers Randy Dennis and Robyn Unruh, marketing director for the Long Beach Visitors Bureau.



Photo by Damian Mulinix

Visitors to the 2014 Long Beach Clam Festival jockey to get a taste of one of the clam fritter recipes prepared by Ilwaco High culinary students.



Photo by Damian Mulinix

Children explore the downtown park that features the original giant frying pan.



Photo by Lynette Rae McAdams

Josh Oakland and Rachel Betron, graduate students from Seattle, pose on their spring break with a giant wooden sculpture of a Pacific razor clam in downtown Long Beach, Washington. The clam, located at Fifth Street South and Pacific Avenue, "spits" at the top of every hour, or on command, for 25 cents.

# CLAM FEST 2016

Saturday and Sunday, April 9 and 10

[longbeachrazorclamfestival.com](http://longbeachrazorclamfestival.com)

## Clam digging lessons:

Bolstad Pavilion, 6:45 a.m. Saturday; 7:30 a.m. Sunday (pre-register online)

## Clam cleaning demos:

Bolstad Pavilion, 9 to 10 a.m. Saturday; 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. Sunday

## Clam contests and gear vendors

Dennis Company, 8 a.m. to noon Saturday

## Saturday Market Preview:

Port of Ilwaco, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday

## Amateur chowder competition:

Long Beach Elks Lodge, 11 a.m. to noon Saturday (registration is closed)

## Oregon Mermaids:

Long Beach train depot, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday

## Clam chowder taste-off:

Long Beach Elks Lodge, 1 to 3 p.m. Saturday (\$10 entry fee)

## Clam fritter cook-off:

Veterans Memorial Park, 3 to 5 p.m. Saturday

## Beer, BBQ, and live music:

Veterans Memorial Park, 3 to 6 p.m. Saturday

# MOLLUSK MADNESS

## FOOD, HISTORY AND FUN COMBINE AT THE ANNUAL RAZOR CLAM FESTIVAL IN LONG BEACH, WASHINGTON

Story by LYNETTE RAE McADAMS

Those were the good old days: One giant frying pan, two Bathing Clam Beauties, a weekend's worth of good digging, and enough clam chowder to feed the hungry masses.

Though that's a scene from more than 75 years ago, this weekend the past will happily repeat, as locals and visitors gather once more at the annual Razor Clam Festival — the oldest, and also, newest, event on Washington's Long Beach Peninsula.

"I wasn't aware of the history at first," admits Randy Dennis, festival organizer and owner of the Dennis Company, a local chain of hardware and general stores with five locations on the coast. As a member of the Long Beach Merchants Association, the festival's primary sponsor, Dennis says he was just trying, like everyone else, to think of a way to promote business during tourism's "shoulder season" — those all-too-slow months leading up to summer. "But as soon as I mentioned the idea," he says, "people started filling me in."

Originating in 1940, the Razor Clam Festival helped put the peninsula on the map, attracting visitors to the windswept shores of Long Beach with the tasty promise of the World's Largest Clam Fritter, cooked publicly in the World's Largest Frying Pan, alongside vats of fresh chowder. More than 200 pounds of Washington's beloved bivalve graced

that 8-foot-wide pan, and hordes of people gathered to watch as a team of chefs maneuvered the fritter with garden hoes and two-foot-wide spatulas. The following year saw an even bigger pan, and, with it, bigger crowds.

In 1948, hoping to broaden the festival's appeal even further, the enormous pan went on a Northwest tour, accompanied by the supremely popular Bathing Clam Beauties (swim suit models clad in razor clam bikinis), and a caravan of 30 cars. Making stops throughout Washington, Idaho and Oregon, the entourage garnered plenty of attention — some would even say, too much. Exploitation of the beaches, along with over-harvesting, had caused clam numbers to plummet; the largest Razor Clam Festival, it turned out, would also be the last.

That is, of course, until 2013, when Randy Dennis thought of it all over again.

A local boy through and through, Dennis grew up harvesting razor clams, even digging commercially for a time in his youth. Today, he credits awareness and regulation at a state level for the abundance of clams that have returned to local beaches.

"The Department of Fish and Wildlife has done an incredible job helping ensure this resource remains for us and future generations. Decades ago, our beaches were in jeopardy, and we nearly put ourselves out of business, but I think

we learned from that," he says. "Reinstating the festival feels like a celebration."

Now in its fourth year (or its 13th, depending on how you count them), the festival has regained the momentum of its nascent years, building on an original repertoire of favorites. Kicking things off, quite appropriately, is a morning clam

**'SOME OF MY BEST MEMORIES ARE WRAPPED UP IN CLAM DIGGING, AND THAT'S TRUE FOR A LOT OF FOLKS AROUND HERE. I THINK IT'S EXCITING TO SHARE THAT WITH VISITORS — SOMETHING THAT'S SO UNIQUELY LONG BEACH, SO COMPLETELY US.'**

dig, with low tide arriving at 8:52 a.m. on Saturday, April 9. Don't know a shovel from a clam gun? No worries. Join the pros for a free lesson on the beach, followed by a cleaning demonstration. (Participants must pre-register online and arrive with their own gear and shellfish license.)

Once your clams are well in hand, head downtown to the Dennis Company, where you can enter to win cash prizes for the biggest clam, smallest clam, and best looking limit, or take a guess at how many clam shells are in the display tank. Free giveaways and expert advice will also be available from a multitude of manufacturers, just in case it's time to upgrade your clam gear.

Maybe you're not quite the sporting type, but you're more apt to be in it for the eating. No shame in that, just follow your nose to the Amateur Chowder Competition, where 13 pre-selected contestants will compete for cash and (obviously) local stardom, as their homemade chowders are put to the test by four renowned chefs from Seattle's Tom Douglas restaurants. Stick around, though, because that's just a warm up to the main event, which is sure to be the annual Clam Chowder Taste-off.

"Last year was amazing," says Dennis, who advises an early arrival to the afternoon event. "People were wrapped around the block and down the street waiting to get in."

That of course, seems completely reasonable. After all,

10 local restaurants are turning out for the annual people's choice competition, where participants vie for the coveted "Best Clam Chowder" trophy (not to mention absolute bragging rights), and space is limited. An entry fee of \$10 buys a tasting-size portion from each restaurant, a beverage, a ballot, a 2016 tide book, Clam Festival coupons, and vintage Clam Festival postcards.

If you still haven't had your fill, there's always that giant frying pan, remember? Thankfully, a shiny, newer replica, christened at the 2014 festival, will be sizzling once again as eight local celebrities (including Sen. Dean Takko and Rep. Brian Blake, both members of the Washington State Legislature) cook up some of the best fritters since the 1940s. Or so they say. The festival's master chefs will again be the judge, awarding one winner with \$250 to donate to the local non-profit organization of their choice. Onlookers get free samples (while supplies last), and an adjacent beer garden, hosted by North Jetty Brewing, will offer pours that lean (hopefully) toward the less clammy.

Balancing tradition with a touch of something new, this year's docket includes a visit from the Oregon Mermaids, who'll be in full fishy regalia at the downtown train depot, where kids can hear interactive stories about the ocean habitat, learn songs, enjoy face painting, and even try on a mermaid tail themselves.

Not to be upstaged, the Bathing Clam Beauties will still abound, along with Dennis Duck, the WDFW Razor Clam, and the Beard's Hollow Pirates, who'll all be strutting their stuff throughout downtown, dancing to live music and generally hamming it up (clamming it up?) for photo ops.

"I think the appeal of the festival is simple," says Dennis. "This is about good old-fashioned outdoor family fun. Some of my best memories are wrapped up in clam digging, and that's true for a lot of folks around here. I think it's exciting to share that with visitors — something that's so uniquely Long Beach, so completely us. I think once people experience that, they're always going to come back."

So far, he's exactly right. "The festival has been really popular and well-received," says Andi Day, executive director of the Long Beach Peninsula Visitor's Bureau. "It's authentically Northwest, and that's very attractive, but also, it celebrates something so special — the act of gathering food and preparing it together — that's very rare these days," she says, adding (because she clearly couldn't help herself), "people really seem to dig it."

## WEEKEND LOW TIDES

8:52 a.m. Saturday (-1.1)

9:41 a.m. Sunday (-1.0)

(Best digging is usually 1 to 2 hours before low tide)



Submitted photo

The Long Beach Razor Clam Festival started in 1940, attracting visitors with the tasty promise of the World's Largest Clam Fritter, cooked publicly in the World's Largest Frying Pan.