

bringing THE RIVER BACK

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Art by **Patty Mathews**

The confidence in the sweeping waters that once satisfied the appetite of any and all local fishermen has been restored with the help of the Ogeechee Riverkeeper. “There is something special about the taste of wild catfish from the river. The smaller ones have the sweetest taste and are my favorites, especially served fried, bone-in,” says Fulton Love, of the famous Love’s Seafood Restaurant.





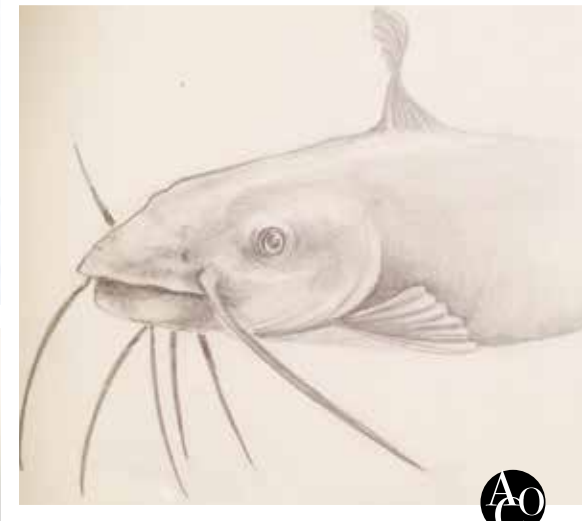
I met with Fulton and his wife, Donna Love, to learn more about their deep connection and affection for the Ogeechee River.

The Loves have a long history of serving locally caught fish. “We began by my Momma cooking the fish that locals caught in the river. Then, she began offering sides – but whatever Momma chose to fix that day is what you ate with your fish,” he recalls of his early days on the river in the 1950s. “There used to be nine fishing camps along the Ogeechee; we could look out and see around 100 wooden boats enjoying the river on the weekends.”

While those days will never return, the Loves are thrilled that the Ogeechee River’s water quality has been restored to levels comparable to the 1980s after the devastating fish-kill in 2011. They remember their initial concerns about changes in the river and fishing conditions, and they also remember their horror as their beloved river fell victim to one of the largest fish-kills in Georgia history. Over 38,000 fish, mussels and other marine wildlife – including alligators, turtles and birds – were found dead along a 70-mile stretch of river from Screven County to Chatham County. The fish-kill began downstream from the King America Finishing discharge pipe in Dover. Fulton shudders as he recalls.

“We stopped fishing, as any fish we did catch had sores on them and were clearly unfit to eat – something was really wrong. We could not go boating or swimming in the Ogeechee for the first time in my life,” he says. “Losing the river as we knew it was like losing a loved one. The difference is that with the river, there was always hope that we could get it back – and we did with the help of Ogeechee Riverkeeper.”







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Ogeechee Riverkeeper (ORK) is a nonprofit organization founded in 2005 with a mission to protect, preserve and improve the water quality of the Ogeechee River basin. To accomplish this goal, Ogeechee Riverkeeper strives to amplify the voices of concerned citizens and strengthen their efforts to protect their rivers and their communities. Comprehensive and stringent environmental protections were put in place and programs were established to aid in restoration efforts along the river following the fish-kill. The vast majority of the settlement is being invested into specific regeneration and protection programs.

The nonprofit advocacy group’s efforts were instrumental in nursing the river back to health and guaranteeing it is never again harmed by industrial, municipal or agricultural dischargers. ORK staff regularly reviews discharge monitoring reports and conducts toxicity testing and biological monitoring on bugs and fish.

“Ogeechee Riverkeeper really came together to fight the fish-kill and became an organization that everyone can be proud of,” Donna Love says about her admiration of the group. “I am extremely impressed with what they continue to do under the leadership of Emily Markesteyn Kurilla, the organization’s Executive Director and Riverkeeper.”

Donna was invited to join ORK’s board of directors in 2013 and is dedicated to helping grow the organization. “Be-

ing on the board made me realize just how big the river basin is and how what is happening upriver in Claxton or Louisville affects us all the way on the coast,” says Donna.

The Ogeechee River Basin goes far beyond Kings Ferry and flows past Kilkenny. “We are all connected by the Ogeechee. I would love for all who enjoy the benefits of her to become more involved with the monitoring, cleanliness and ongoing protection by sponsoring Ogeechee Riverkeeper’s tireless work to protect it,” she says.

The Loves have just reintroduced wild-caught local catfish to their menu and have returned to their ways of enjoying the Great Ogeechee River and all of her bounty.

In celebration of Earth Month, Love’s Seafood Restaurant is selling cartoon paper catfish for \$1 each. Funds raised will support Ogeechee Riverkeeper’s work. “I encourage everybody who lives in this region to stop and think about how important the river is to our quality of life and economy,” Donna says.

Whatever your position, please think about joining Ogeechee Riverkeeper – annual membership starts at only \$35. Businesses can participate in the corporate partnership program and anybody can make a donation or attend their fundraising events. ●

For more information on Ogeechee Riverkeeper:

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