Oyster grant given

By JEAN JONES
Staff Writer

COMMERCIAL TWP. — The Delaware Bay Section of the Shellfisheries Council learned Tuesday that a time grant of $150,000 has been awarded by the state to plant shells and conduct an intermediate transplant.

Jim Joseph, chief of the Bureau of Shellfisheries, announced the grant at Tuesday's council meeting.

The award will augment the clutch fund, which is used to plant clean shells on which larval oysters can attach for continued growth, and to move oysters from the upper seed beds, where they grow very slowly, to beds further downbay for more rapid growth and harvest.

Joseph said the current balance in the clutch fund is $97,000.

"Hopefully, the Governor will sign the bill. It's on the Governor's desk for her signature. I can't imagine her not signing it," he said.

He thanked oysterman Barney Hollinger and council chairman Richard J. Malinowski for making calls and pushing to get the bill passed.

Malinowski was re-elected.

Joseph said he would get a group together to discuss what type of intermediate transplant will be conducted this year and shell planting.

Dr. Susan Ford, Haskin Shellfish Laboratory researcher, asked oystermen how members of the industry felt the transplant was working.

Although some of the transplants died, others survived and were harvested.

Some oystermen said the oysters harvested from the intermediate transplant are what is keeping them going.

"I saw quite a few boats working the transplanted area," Bailey said.

Joseph also said he spoke to the state marine fisheries council at its Thursday meeting and described some of the ideas suggested for aquaculture, using creeks and shallow areas.

"There was no comment. I suspect there will be concern about horseshoe crabs and birds. I'm going to speak to the Nongame and Endangered Species people tomorrow and see what areas might be used," he said.

No vice chairman is elected, but Malinowski designated Councilman Bill Bradway to sit in for him if necessary.

Richard M. Malinowski of the Bureau of Shellfisheries, reported on the status of the harvest using different criteria than used for his report last month.

In response to Malinowski's report that the catch per effort was falling each year, Councilman Scott Bailey asked if the change could be recalculated separating out the boats with one dredge from those with two.

The new report still showed a decline. Malinowski said he checked for the years 1997 to 1999 and the catch per effort for boats using one dredge had dropped from 60 bushels to 20 bushels and for boats with two dredges the catch had dropped from 130 to 60 bushels.

"You can see that it's pretty much across the board," he said.

The average for one dredge was down 51 percent overall and the average for two dredges was down 41 percent, Malinowski said.