



GOOD FENCES REALLY DO MAKE GOOD NEIGHBORS IN THE TOWN OF OXFORD, MARYLAND



Oxford's artistic white picket fences garner admiration, civic pride, and charitable donations

Oxford, MD – Nestled on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, the Town of Oxford may be diminutive (its population numbers less than 1,000), but what it lacks in size it more than makes up for in creativity, character, and civic-mindedness. Case in point: community leaders in this tiny-but-terrific town dreamed up a unique annual event-experience that showcases local artists, good causes, the town's history, charm, and beauty, and a healthy lifestyle – all at once!

What could it be? Why, the Oxford Picket Fence Project.

A multi-modal, multi-month, multi-purpose event, the project was inspired by photographs of charming picket fences gracing lawns around the Town of Oxford in the mid-1800s. But not just any charming picket fences – distinctive and exotic ones, marked by an onion-dome peak with a center hole at the tip of each plank. The origin of this unique fence style is unknown, but many suspect that a sea captain-turned-carpenter was inspired by his travels to Russia, India, or the Middle East, all places where this architectural shape has been popular for centuries.

Conceived and sponsored by the Oxford Business Association (OBA), the Oxford Picket Fences Project debuted in the summer of 2009, expanded in 2010, and is expected to be even more popular in 2011. The process begins with the assembly and distribution of 18 unpainted red cedar wood picket fence segments, each about the size of a small gate, to 18 local artists, who are free to decorate, reconfigure, and reinvent the fence at will. Completed fences are then placed on display from Memorial Day to mid-September.

Scattered throughout town in fun and surprising locations as well as more obvious ones, the fences are the reward in an around-the-town treasure hunt. Connoisseurs of fine (and fun) craftsmanship may choose the serendipitous approach, spotting the fences at random as they stroll through town, or take advantage of a map to design their own tours of these fanciful creations and the scenic beauty of Oxford town. Names of a few fences from years past: *Crabby*, *Paradise*, *Liquid Gold*, and *All My Ducks in a Row*.

Come autumn, the fences are auctioned at notable locations around town – in 2011, at the historic barn on the charming waterside estate of the Combsberry Inn. Programs are handed out to the assembled to explain the auction procedures, and the fences are on display for viewing. Silent bidding takes place first; thereafter, any fence that received more than 10 bids is included in a live auction. (In 2010, ten fences met that criterion, with the highest bid coming in at \$1,000.) Online bidding is an option as well. Ferry boat captain Tom Bixler serves as the guest auctioneer -- and a fine one he is at that – while various town businesses donate cuisine and supplies that, together with the efforts of the OBA Picket Fence Committee, transform the auction into a rollicking event.

The artistry, conviviality, history, and charm of Oxford all come together in this unique experience, but visitors and residents alike appreciate the last and finest fact about the Oxford Picket Fences Project: half of the profits from the event are donated to the favorite charity of the artist whose fence raises the money at the auction. (Last year's recipient: The Salvation Army.)

The Town of Oxford, Maryland: docks, daydreams, discoveries, and so much more

About Oxford, Maryland:

The historic town of Oxford, Maryland, founded in 1683, is located in Talbot County on the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay. Until the American Revolution, Oxford was an international shipping center, surrounded by tobacco plantations and home to a number of prominent national figures. Later it thrived on oyster harvesting and packing and other watermen's trades, even as tourism and leisure activities increased. It guards its peaceful personality, architectural integrity, and small-town virtues to this day, while warmly welcoming visitors from right next door and around the world. The Oxford Business Association welcomes inquiries by telephone (1-410-226-5122) and at its website (www.porttoxford.com); the Town of Oxford website has a calendar of events and additional information (www.oxfordmd.net); and the Talbot County Office of Tourism offers comprehensive information and trip planning services at its Easton office (1-410-770-8000) and on its website (www.tourtalbot.org).

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