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Programming planned to explore local Elizabethan Connections to Lower Shore

Crisfield, MD--Smith Island and Tangier Island natives have an accent and dialect that is distinctive on the shore. Popular belief holds that their speech is directly descended from Elizabethan English, the language of Shakespeare. Is this really so? Crisfield Heritage Foundation is planning a series of events entitled *Shakespeare on the Chesapeake*, on Sunday, September 16--including a performance of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* by Brown Box Theatre Project--that will explore these intriguing connections.

Claire Otterbein, Executive Director of Crisfield Heritage Foundation says, "I've always heard about this connection between Smith and Tangier Island speech and Elizabethan English. I think many of us have. So, when Brown Box Theatre said they'd bring their Shakespeare series to Crisfield for the first time, it seemed like a great opportunity to explore the language of the islands and see if there really is a link to Shakespeare's English."

"This year Brown Box Theatre Project is excited to expand our Free Outdoor Shakespeare tour to Crisfield," said Artistic Director Kyler Taustin. "Exploring the linguistic relationship between Elizabethan speech and the Islands adds another fascinating layer to our work in the region."

The programming begins at 1 pm at the Tawes Museum: Dr. Jana Kopelent Rehak presents the documentary *Family Frames*, a film exploring Smith Island history through pictures and interviews. Old island photos hold memories that unlock individual and social memories. When islanders read their family photographs, they identify kinship ties and comment on the land, houses, or activities in the photos. By the references to these points, Smith Islanders tell the story of the history of the island. The film's creator, Dr. Jana Kopelent Rehak, Assistant Researcher at UMBC and Senior Lecturer at UMCP will present and answer questions. This program is courtesy of Somerset County Library with additional funding for the film provided by the *Institute for Museum and Library Services* through a Library Services and Technology Act grant, and by the Maryland Sea Grant.

At 2 pm, Professor Natalie Schilling of Georgetown University will offer a lecture, *Is Smith Island English Shakespeare's English?* Professor of Linguistics Schilling will describe the

findings of her years-long research on the speech of Smith Islanders. She will provide the fascinating answer to the question posed in the lecture's title. Is the connection true or just local lore? The program is free to the public, and refreshments will be served. This program is supported by a grant from the Community Foundation of the Eastern Shore.

Stay for the *Island Speakers Panel* at 3 pm. After getting an academic perspective, learn about the lived experience of island residents. Native residents of Smith and Tangier Islands will discuss their memories and experiences of their distinctive speech during this informal presentation. Be prepared for some great storytellers! Former Executive Director of the Smith Island Cultural Center and Smith Island native, Sherri Marsh Johns will facilitate this informal presentation. The program is free to the public, and refreshments will be served. This program is supported by a grant from the Community Foundation of the Eastern Shore.

On Sunday evening enjoy the grand finale of Crisfield's series of Elizabethan heritage programming: a live performance of Shakespeare's comedy *As You Like It* under the stars at Somers Cove Marina at 7:30 pm! For 8 seasons ***Brown Box Theatre Project*** has presented outdoor Shakespeare around the Peninsula, and this year for the first time they come to Crisfield! *As You Like It* will transport audiences into the heart of one of Shakespeare's most beloved comedies in a can't-miss multi-state tour. The performance is free to the public and supported by a grant from Somerset County Arts Council. Light refreshments will be for sale prior to the performance.

For those looking to experience Smith Island in person before Sunday's events, the Crisfield & Smith Island Cultural Alliance is holding their annual event, ***A Taste of Smith Island***, on Saturday, September 15. For the cost of \$55, guests receive transportation from Crisfield to Smith Island and back via the *Chelsea Lane Tyler*, and a meal featuring crab soup, clam fritters, crab balls, authentic Smith Island cake, and more. The boat departs Crisfield at 3 pm. Proceeds benefit the Smith Island Cultural Center. To purchase tickets, call 410-425-3351.

Shakespeare on the Chesapeake is made possible through grants from the **Community Foundation of the Eastern Shore, American Legion Post #16, and Somerset County Arts Council**, and by partnerships with **Somers Cove Marina, Somerset County Library, and Brown Box Theatre Project**.

CHF's entities include the J. Millard Tawes Historical Museum, Oyster Reef Gift Shop, Ward Brothers Workshop, Cedar Island Marsh Sanctuary, and the Crisfield Customs House. Museum and Oyster Reef Gift Shop hours are 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Tuesdays through Saturdays, and 10 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on Sundays, now through the end of September, with other hours as announced for special events and educational programs. Additional information is available on the organization's website, crisfieldheritage.org.

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