



Donald "Don" "Mutt" W. Meritt

October 24, 1949 - May 25, 2026

Donald "Don" Wayne Meritt, a towering figure in Chesapeake Bay oyster restoration and a lifelong resident of Maryland's Eastern Shore, passed away peacefully on May 25, 2026, at Arcadia of Denton. He was 76 years old.

Born in Easton, MD, on October 24, 1949, Don was the son of the late Robert E. Meritt and Margaret Eason Meritt Tennant. Growing up along the banks of Oak Creek, he developed an early, profound connection to the water. As a boy and young man, he spent his days crabbing and fishing, eventually working as a waterman—trotrlining for crabs and shaft tonging for oysters on the Miles River, Broad Creek, and the Tred Avon.

Don was the first male in a large extended family to graduate from high school, a milestone heavily influenced by his high school teacher, Dick Kleen, who recognized his potential and encouraged him to pursue higher education. Don went on to graduate with a Bachelor's degree from St. Mary's College in 1972. His deep curiosity about the natural world eventually led him to the University of Maryland, College Park, where he earned his Doctorate in 1993. His professional legacy is permanently woven into the health and history of the Chesapeake Bay. Not long out of college, Don began working at a modest, newly developing hatchery at the Chesapeake Biological Laboratory located in Solomon's, MD to study the potential for rehabilitating oyster stocks devastated by the 1972 Tropical Storm Agnes. When the program moved to the newly established Horn Point Laboratory in Cambridge, MD, Don went with it.

Affectionately known simply as “Mutt,” he dedicated nearly five decades to the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science. As a Horn Point faculty member and a shellfish specialist for the Maryland Sea Grant Extension Program, and eventually as the Director and Program Leader of the Horn Point Laboratory Oyster Hatchery, Don transformed a modest operation using five-gallon buckets into one of the largest oyster hatcheries on the East Coast. Under his visionary leadership, dedication, and collaborative arrangements with organizations like the Oyster Recovery Partnership and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, the hatchery achieved staggering, record-breaking milestones—producing billions of disease-free oyster spat annually to restore the Bay’s ecology and cultivate a thriving local aquaculture industry. Despite his academic credentials, Mutt always maintained the heart, grit, and approachability of an Eastern Shore waterman, acting as a crucial bridge between the scientific community and local watermen.

Away from the hatchery, Mutt’s favorite companion and sidekick for 18 wonderful years was his beloved Basset Hound, “Snoopy,” who traveled life’s paths faithfully by his side. Mutt cherished the simple pleasures of life on the Eastern Shore, surrounded by the family and waters he loved so dearly. He is survived by his beloved wife, the former Joyce Horn Meritt of Easton; two sons, Christopher Handley and his wife, Claudia, of Severn, MD, and Brent Handley of Pearland, TX; and his sister, Denise Taylor and her husband, Pat, of Newcomb, MD. He is also survived by his sisters-in-law, Carol Thomas (David), Phyllis Phillips (Paul), Tammie Horn, and Rachel Horn; his brother-in-law, Glenn Horn (Brenda); and many beloved nieces, nephews, former colleagues, and lifelong friends. Along with his parents, he was preceded in death by his stepfather, Samuel Tennant, and his brother-in-law, Harold Horn. Mutt’s love for the outdoors led to many activities including coaching little league, softball, fishing, hunting, birding, photography, scuba diving, and traveling.

The family expresses their deepest gratitude to Mutt’s caregivers for their

exceptional compassion, kindness, and dedication in making his final journey an easier one.

The family invites friends to join them in a true Eastern Shore celebration of Mutt's life on Saturday, July 18th, 2026, at 1:00 PM at the Family Home in Newcomb, located at 25886 Walnut St., for a casual time of food, friendship, and sharing fond memories.

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests memorial donations be made in Don's honor to the Dick Kleen Fund of the Mid Shore Community Foundation (102 E. Dover St., Easton, MD 21601 www.MSCF.org), coming full circle to support the community education and opportunities that shaped his own remarkable life.

For online condolences, please visit: www.fhnfuneralhome.com

Tribute Wall

RU

“ Mutt was a commanding figure, not only in the hatchery, but on the volleyball court and softball field. My sincere condolences to his family. May he rest in peace! Bob Ulanowicz, from CBL

Robert Ulanowicz - Yesterday at 05:28 PM

DW

“ I planted oysters for the hatchery for 20 years. I never once doubted Mutt's dedication and commitment to the Hatchery program. He continually worked to make improvements in the program. What started out as shell bags spread from a workboat, grew into a World class production, with us planting millions of spat a day. I credit Mutt and his awesome team, for this success. Sending Prayers for comfort to his family.

Doug West - June 14 at 08:07 AM

SH

“ I am sending love and condolences to Mutt's family. I spent time with Mutt as a member of the University of Maryland dance team. He was such a kind soul and a pleasure to be around. Each year I was on the team, he put together collages of photos from the season and printed out copies for the team members to have as mementos at the end of the season. We all appreciated this so much, and knew he did this extra work in his limited free time. He will be so missed on the UMD sidelines!

Shannon - June 11 at 09:00 PM

MB

“ I was so sorry to learn of Mutt’s passing and want to send condolences to his family. I think I speak for many UMD dance team members that we appreciated his dedication to photographing our team at football games and always wishing us a happy birthday on Facebook! As someone who graduated almost 20 years ago, Mutt’s photos are essentially the only ones I have documenting a really special time in my life, and I cherish them so much. I hope he knew how much we appreciated him.

Mary Beaver - June 10 at 09:15 PM

EM

“ Mutt was always on the UMD sidelines taking the dance team pictures and cheering us on. He was a staple in the organization and will be fondly missed but remember for all the great energy he brought.

Emily Miller - June 10 at 11:02 AM

KO

“ Through Oyster Recovery Partnership I worked with Mutt for many years. He made a defined difference in what together we were able to achieve in the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay. His contributions will never be forgotten.

Karen Oertel - June 10 at 09:24 AM

KR

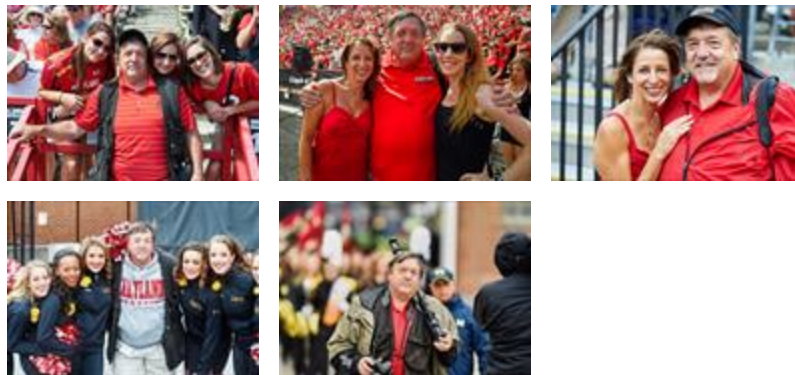
“Joyce and All - I'm so saddened to hear of Mutt's passing. While our time together was almost exclusively on Saturdays in the fall, we enjoyed our common passion of photography. Across the years, he not only helped me become a better photographer, but a better person. He always had a ready ear and would offer advice if asked, and not offer if it wasn't asked :-).

I still look back fondly on a day we spent together in the Delaware and eastern shore nature reserves, birdwatching and photographing the wildlife. Will miss his sly humour, quick wit, and sharp tongue.

Privately, Joyce, I'll share our misadventure of the day trying to shoot at Obama's inauguration - we both aged a few years that day, and I'm betting he never spoke of it :-)

Thanks for sharing him with MSOM and his University of Maryland family. We all grieve with you.

Ken Rubin



Ken Rubin - June 09 at 07:39 PM

JC

“ Joyce George Cox lit a candle in memory of Donald "Don" "Mutt" W. Meritt



Joyce George Cox - June 08 at 06:25 PM

KP

“ Joyce & all of Mutt's family, Everyone from the Mighty Sound of Maryland Bands & the University of Maryland Dance Team will miss him. He was beyond generous with his time, supporting all of us & capturing countless photos for everyone. Prayers & Gratitude for all the memories, Kelly & all his TERP family

k pasciuto - June 07 at 09:25 PM

JA

“ Best baseball coach I ever had. Never forget the day he brought plywood gloves to practice and I never stopped using 2 hands to catch a baseball. Your not gone to me because I dont think ill ever stop talking about ya.

Jason Ashcraft - June 07 at 03:52 PM

WS

“ Mutt played a pivotal role in advancing oyster restoration in Maryland and throughout the Chesapeake Bay. The lasting impact of his work can be seen in the billions of oysters planted and the restoration progress achieved over the past several decades. On behalf of the Oyster Recovery Partnership, we extend our condolences to his family, friends, and colleagues.

Ward Slacum - June 06 at 08:02 AM

LP

“ Rest in peace Mutt , you will be missed



Lisa Pope - June 05 at 07:20 AM

DH

“ Mutt was/is, in a word...EXCEPTIONAL. From dormitory days at St. Mary's College of Maryland to participating and competing on the Kayak and Canoe Club to taking care of my '59 VW (while I fulfilled my military service in the U.S. Coast Guard) to his time as the “Owl Man” of Maryland to an interview with Mike Rowe to sharing his projects at Horn Point to having a beer and soft crab sandwich to being a stellar FRIEND, Don always found a way to give of himself. I will miss you Mutt. And, I know the memories shared amongst those who knew, admired and loved you will carry us until we meet again.

David Hans - June 04 at 03:33 PM

LA

“ Mutt was a good friend, an one of a trio of photographers who hung out and traveled together photographing, was always a good time. Miss you buddy !!



Larry - June 04 at 09:24 AM

DW

“ I had the pleasure to work at Horn Pt when Mutt had rock fish in the old Dupont swimming pool in front of the lab office i worked in. He then began working on oysters and the Cheaspeake Bay will always be better for his vision of raising oyster spat. We both were alums of St. Mary's College and CBL Solomons Island.



With sympathy to Joyce, Mutt's family and Friends.

💜🕊️💜 May Mutt Rest in Peace 🕊️💜🕊️

Donna L West - June 04 at 08:32 AM

CW

“ Connie & Don Webster lit a candle in memory of Donald "Don" "Mutt" W. Meritt



Connie & Don Webster - June 03 at 01:33 PM

PF

“ Phil Foster lit a candle in memory of Donald "Don" "Mutt" W. Meritt



Phil Foster - June 03 at 02:51 AM

NP

“ Naomi Phillips lit a candle in memory of Donald "Don" "Mutt" W. Meritt



Naomi Phillips - June 02 at 09:44 PM

NP

Mutt, I'll never forget you and all you taught me about hatchery, birds, and laughs and jokes, and so many times you made me blush. You and Joyce were great friends to me ❤️🙏🙏

Naomi Phillips - June 02 at 09:47 PM

GB

“ Thank you Mutt for all you did, especially Little League and what you did for Jordan (8 Ball) in little league in 2001. RIP



Gary and Kathy Ball - June 02 at 09:04 PM

SJ

“ RIP Mutt you will be missed by many!!!



Sol James - June 02 at 08:34 PM

CM

“ Cathy Magrogan lit a candle in memory of Donald "Don" "Mutt" W. Meritt



Cathy Magrogan - June 02 at 01:37 PM

ME

“ *"Mr Mutt" was a coach on the 1990 Easton Little League All-Star team, and that was the first time I met him. I loved having him as a coach, and I remember him catching me in an early bullpen session and yelling over to Mr Schriver (the All-Star head coach) going "Harold his fastball moves 3 different ways!!" And then he made me throw all 3 with Mr Schriver behind him like an umpire! My heart hurts that Mr Mutt isn't on this earth with us any more, but I know I'll see him eventually! Keep your glove oiled until I get there Mr Mutt, I am looking forward to having a catch with you again!*

Michael Endzel - June 02 at 12:47 PM

RM

“ *St. Michaels High School classmate and friend*
Rodger McQuay



Rodger McQuay - June 02 at 12:25 PM

DP

“ *Doug Pierson lit a candle in memory of Donald "Don" "Mutt" W. Meritt*



Doug Pierson - June 02 at 08:29 AM

JA

“ *Jim & Becky Ashcraft lit a candle in memory of Donald "Don" "Mutt" W. Meritt*



Jim & Becky Ashcraft - June 01 at 10:55 PM

BF

“ *Ben And Suzanne Forrest lit a candle in memory of Donald "Don" "Mutt" W. Meritt*



Ben and Suzanne Forrest - June 01 at 07:34 PM

SS

“ There will never be another “Mutt” and all those that knew him know what I mean. From being dedicated Little League baseball coach who helped shape many young men’s live to one of the most dedicated oyster scientists this world has ever seen, he was one of a kind. I’ll never forget him calling me from Wyoming in 1982 telling me he heard my first homerun on the radio from Salisbury. Total nonsense but I remember it to this day and it was that important to him to call from that far away. RIP
Muttsy—you brought me many laughs and great memories.

Steve Satchell - May 29 at 08:42 PM

MR

“ Mutt was the main driver of the oyster hatchery program in MD which has proved essential to restoring oysters on sanctuaries, rotational harvest reefs and the genesis of MD’s oyster aquaculture industry. Governors, Senators, Legislators and TV personalities all wanted to talk with Mutt about oyster restoration. Other states in the NE and mid-Atlantic developed oyster hatcheries with help and guidance from Mutt.

Mike Roman - May 29 at 08:38 AM

DB

“ Mutt contributed so much to the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science over the years I headed it. His innovations in oyster cultivation were essential to the great success of restoration. Next time you eat a Chesapeake oyster, thank Mutt. RIP, my friend and sincere condolences to Joyce and the family.

Don Boesch - May 29 at 07:42 AM

JC

“ JC and I are so sorry to hear about Mutt.
Sending you all lots of love and hugs.



JC and Debbie Correa - May 28 at 07:27 PM

KK

“ Kevin And Ronnie Knopp lit a candle in
memory of Donald "Don" "Mutt" W. Meritt



Kevin and Ronnie Knopp - May 28 at 06:12 PM

DW

“ As a former Board chair of the Oyster Recovery Partnership, I am
deeply saddened by Mutt's passing. We could never have
succeeded without his support and cooperation. RIP my friend.

Dale Wright - May 28 at 05:40 PM

GB

“ George Ball lit a candle in memory of Donald
"Don" "Mutt" W. Meritt



George Ball - May 28 at 10:00 AM

BD

“ Betsy Dyott lit a candle in memory of Donald "Don" "Mutt" W. Meritt



Betsy Dyott - May 28 at 06:35 AM

FH

“ Our sincere condolences to the family



Frank and Gail Hastings - May 27 at 07:59 PM

BC

“ Brenda Holland Cummings sent a virtual gift in memory of Donald "Don" "Mutt" W. Meritt



Brenda Holland Cummings - May 27 at 02:45 PM

PH

“ Pat Haddaway lit a candle in memory of Donald "Don" "Mutt" W. Meritt



Pat Haddaway - May 27 at 01:29 PM

JW

Many fond memories of our days coaching in Easton Little League.

Jim Watson - May 29 at 08:29 PM

ES

Joyce and family, Ellen and I are so sorry to hear this. We will be praying for you at Friendship this Sunday. Ernie Smith

Ernie Smith - June 04 at 08:58 PM