



*Aylesworth's*  
**FISH & BAIT, INC.**



**1295 - 28th Street S**

**SINCE 1944**

# Luring the Best and Brightest

**Aylesworth Foundation Scholarships provide long-term investment in marine science research.**

Since 1986, the Aylesworth Foundation for the Advancement of Marine Science has supported university students in academic disciplines related to the marine environment. Aylesworth scholarships in excess of \$581,000 have been awarded to more than 100 students at 14 Florida universities. The foundation would not be possible without the support of Aylesworth Fish & Bait in St. Petersburg, run by husband and wife owners Bobby and Dawn Aylesworth. Bobby shares about the industry and philanthropy with *FLORIDA TREND*.

## Tell us about Aylesworth Fish & Bait and the bait industry in Florida.

“My father and uncle started the company in 1944. It was actually a little hut on the end of the Gulfport Pier. We have gone through some very difficult ups and downs — in particular, the mid-90s when the net ban went into effect. This business was very dependent on the net fishery, and when that went away, we were challenged to reinvent ourselves. That’s how we got involved in focusing on the fishing bait distribution business.

We sell several hundred different types of baits, from just a frozen piece of squid all the way up to a high-end rigged bait. Business is very good, it keeps us quite busy, and we actually have a little fun here too.”

## Tell us about the Aylesworth Foundation for the Advancement of Marine Science.

“My parents saw this as a means to fund research projects that could be beneficial to the industry and have an impact not just in the immediate future, but way down the road. We have provided scholarships to a wide range of students in fields related to the marine sciences — journalism, seafood safety, anthropology, engineering and economics. We have students who have come back as teachers, researchers and professors.”

## What role does Florida Sea Grant play in helping the foundation award scholarships?

“The administration by Florida Sea Grant is very important to our success. They help us find the brightest and most

deserving students by advertising within the network of Sea Grant colleges, pre-screening candidates and then presenting our board with the cream of the crop. We look for smart individuals, Florida residents who are working hard to get their education but might need a little financial help. The scholarship often carries the student through the course of their graduate studies.”

## How can other business leaders become involved with Sea Grant?

“If you own a business in Florida and are interested in establishing a program to support student scholars, it’s easy to set up a program similar to the Aylesworth Scholarship. All it requires is contacting Sea Grant Director Karl Havens to talk about your focus, the number of students you’d like to support each year, those kinds of details. Once it’s set up, Florida Sea Grant can handle all of the administrative work, announcing the opportunities and rating applicants. You end up supporting the best and brightest students in their training related to a coastal or ocean topic in your area.”

## Aylesworth Scholars of Note

**Mark Butler** is an internationally known marine biologist and eminent scholar at Old Dominion University whose research is helping restore Florida Bay sponges.

**Thomas Chesnes** is Chair of Biology at Palm Beach Atlantic University and author of published research on seagrass ecology, fisheries management and the invasive Burmese python in the Everglades.

**Christy Foust** conducted research that examines how stressors related to climate change such as increased salt marsh salinity affect the genetic structure of plants.

She now teaches biology at a Tampa high school STEM academy.

**Lesbeth Rodriguez** focused on techniques to use marine natural products in the pharmaceutical industry and is now Associate Director of Global Regulatory Affairs at Bayer HealthCare in Berkley, CA.

**Michael Tringali**, a genetics researcher for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, discovered the Choctaw bass species unique to Florida’s Panhandle.

**ABOUT FLORIDA SEA GRANT** A university-based program that supports research, education and extension to enhance economic opportunities for Floridians while protecting coastal resources, Sea Grant works in partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Florida Board of Education and Florida’s citizens and governments.

Outreach is integrated with UF/IFAS Extension at the University of Florida, one of the nation’s leading land-grant universities. Florida Sea Grant also has decades of experience running privately-funded scholarships to train the next generation of marine resource managers. If you are interested in supporting a new student scholarship program, please contact Sea Grant Director Karl Havens.

**Learn more about Aylesworth Foundation Scholarships:**

[www.flseagrant.org/aylesworth](http://www.flseagrant.org/aylesworth)



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