



# Estuaries to

story and photos by Gail Brown

**Awakening  
young  
minds  
with  
the gift  
of nature.**

**H**ere come the holidays! And not surprisingly, good citizens from Bristol to Hampton—punctual in most matters—will find themselves caught between the eggnog and the pecan pie with no gift in hand.

Except for the teacher's gift; everyone's ready with that one. And none more so than volunteers Jody Turner, Barbara Dunbar, and Teresa Bennett, creators of *Estuaries to Oceans*, a science field trip experience given each year by these moms to fifth grade students and teachers of York County. While Turner, Dunbar, and Bennett have volunteered for years leading after-school science clubs and establishing outdoor classrooms, they had never before attempted anything of this magnitude.

Yet, like a Christmas cactus suddenly in bloom, *Estuaries to Oceans* seemed to appear without effort. That, of course, is not how it happened at all.

In 2009, giving themselves only 75 days to get it all in place, Turner, Dunbar, and Bennett wrote and received a grant from the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)/Virginia Naturally Partnership grant program. Using grant funds carefully, they purchased materials that could be reused and begged and borrowed the rest. (Children's rooms were looted; husbands' golf equipment and tackle boxes were all fair game.) If their time was short, their focus was clear: All fifth grade students and teachers at Seaford Elementary School would be given a science field trip designed to awaken their curiosity about nature and reconnect them with the natural world. The first field trip, planned for