

# Anthony Van de Wahl

—MASTER GLASSMAN AND PIRATE WITH AN ATTITUDE

Story by Mark Einstein  
Photos by Suzanne Einstein

I first noticed Pirate Tony at a Halloween party two years ago at the Harbor Shack Restaurant in Rock Hall, MD. With his sweeping mane, a meticulously braided goatee and a full ensemble of period attire, Captain Jack Sparrow's stunning likeness sat perched on a bar stool as if at the helm of a 17<sup>th</sup>-century pirate ship. He easily plundered the costume contest prize and has carried the masquerade on to appearances at Rock Hall's schools, business association meetings, and other community assemblies. If fiberglass technology had existed during

the Golden Age of Piracy, Anthony Van de Wahl, might have saved Blackbeard a few shillings on boat repairs. Today, Pirate Tony does not merely repair or restore boats; he transforms them—just as he sometimes transforms himself into the likeness of Captain Jack.

Situated on 260 acres of pristine Eastern Shore farmland just off of Swan Creek near Rock Hall, Van de Wahl's home and place of business remains as secluded from the modern world as would a 1920's era moonshiner's still—an ideal refuge for a 21<sup>st</sup>-century pirate. Crossing a sea of soybeans and cornfields, Suzanne and I find ourselves turning off the beaten path and bouncing along a dusty lane beneath a thick canopy of perfectly aligned cedar trees. *Crab Cake*, our topless Jeep, seems right at home as we approach our destination. We are greeted by widely scattered marine supplies, power tools, and a hodgepodge of old boats having long ago seen better days. Yet, in spite of overwhelming evidence that we are in the right place, there seems to be no sign of Van de Wahl. We follow an olfactory trail of fresh gelcoat and resin to discover the pirate and his crew having a beer after a hard day's work constructing a fiberglass cabin on a sleek, glassed-over wooden workboat. She looks remarkably brand new. "If it's still white, it's still wet," Van de Wahl warns as we approach. He reaches into a cooler, and tosses us each a 10-ounce beer. He is ready to talk.

AVFM, or Anthony Van de Wahl Fiberglass Manufacturing, LLC, is the official incorporation of a lifetime of hard work and practical education. Van de Wahl explains that his unique skill and

present situation are the results of a vast diversity of seemingly unrelated experiences. These include farming, fishing, roofing, accounting, marriage, divorce, fatherhood, and more. Above all else, Van de Wahl attributes his renowned flair for fiberglass to his apprenticeship under David Lennox, the master technician whom he credits with completely revolutionizing the art. "If we just want to pay the bills", he beams, "we can do as much cookie cutter stuff as we want." Such jobs include re-coring decks, fixing holes, repairing gelcoat, etc. "But, what really turns me on," he relates, "are the challenging projects. It's the challenge that keeps me thinking, and it is the thinking that keeps me alive," he remarks with a smile. "We just finished Donny Price's crab boat," he recalls. "We replaced *everything* from the rub rails up!" He performs some accounting in his head. "We got her done with six guys working 12-hour days seven days a week. It took six weeks from the first cut until splashdown. That's a lot of pressure, but it's the kind of stuff we love to do."

Van de Wahl's resemblance to the infamous Captain Jack notwithstanding and even without dressing up, he genuinely evokes the character of a true pirate. "The pirate spirit runs in our family," he laughs, as he explains how his family's origins on the upper Eastern Shore eventually landed him on the Swan Creek family farm. His ancestors trace back to the original inhabitation of Turkey Point at the head of the Bay, a line that includes generations of offbeat entrepreneurs. Van de Wahl's grandparents ultimately migrated to the present site in 1964 after Turkey Point was taken over by the State of Maryland. The original farm is now part of Elk Neck State Park.

After a few moments of conversation, it is easy to see that Van de Wahl is tremendously passionate about his work and about life in general. He is upbeat, positive, and thankful for the existence with which he has been blessed. He calls it his "gratitude attitude." Pontificating with great enthusiasm, Van de Wahl seems to have a bright and well-informed opinion about nearly



every topic under the sun. The Chesapeake Bay may be the source of his greatest devotion, and he makes no bones about our role in its future. "This body of water is the most valuable treasure we have," he asserts. "And it is our job to protect it."

Pirate Tony will be in full form and ceremonial dress on August 9-10 to welcome pirates and wenches from all over the Chesapeake Bay watershed to Rock Hall for the first annual Pirates and Wenches Fantasy Weekend. With a decorated dinghy flotilla, a beach plunder party, live entertainment, pirate ship cruises, grub, grog, and more, the event promises to be a shiplod of fun for buccaneers and landlubbers of all ages. Find out more at [rockhallpirates.com](http://rockhallpirates.com).

**About the Authors:** Mark and Suzanne Einstein live in Rock Hall, MD and operate a scenic charter boat business from the Waterman's Crab House. They contribute fun freelance material for magazines when they are not on the water.



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