

# APALACHICOLA FINDS LITTLE TO BE THANKFUL FOR

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Written By Ed Birk – Associated Press

## APALACHICOLA

Residents of this tiny fishing village made the best of Thanksgiving dinner on Thursday, a week after Hurricane Kate struck another blow to this already devastated community.

State marine experts say the late-season storm did less damage to the oyster beds in Apalachicola Bay than Hurricane Elena in September. But the bay remained closed during its most productive season, leaving the threat of foreclosure hanging over homes, new boats and a way of life that spans generations.

Richard Scarabin, 40, had “worked the water” on and off his entire life until last year, when he gave up his job as a supermarket manager and went down to the bay full time. This summer, he bought a new \$5,000 boat and motor, preparing for a banner harvest of Apalachicola oysters, billed as the fattest and sweetest in either the Gulf of Mexico or the Atlantic Ocean.

“I owe the bank \$260 a month for the next two years and I owe the man \$1,400 for the motor. I’d rather lose that than something I need – the house,” he said.

Franklin County already had one of the highest unemployment rates in the state before Elena. Hurricane Juan and then Kate raked high tides and fierce winds through the bay, putting hundreds of families out of work by destroying the young oyster crop.

Only three of the area’s 17 oyster houses are back in business, and residents have been forced to rely on state and federal aid. Small Business Administration loans promised after Elena have yet to come through.

“What a lot of people were looking for were those SBA loans,” said Scarabin, father of two.

His wife, Doralee, also depended on the bay for income. While Richard would scrape the muddy oyster bars for as much as 30 bushels a day, she would shuck them at one of the oyster houses that line the coast.

“For years, we would always have a big Thanksgiving dinner. The last couple of years we would go camping up river and cook fresh pork,” she said. “And that’s what we had planned this year, but ...”

American Red Cross volunteers were in Apalachicola and Eastpoint on the east side of the Apalachicola River, providing food and emergency repairs to homes and making Thanksgiving a little more enjoyable.