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To keep fishing takes work to build our coastal communities



F/V Jamie Marie off loads in Westport

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It's getting increasingly more difficult for fishermen to make a living. A lot has changed over the years, and the industry is now one of the most regulated in the nation. We are also seeing stronger emphasis on sustainability, which is important for the future of our ocean, and by proxy, our livelihood.

But staying on top of the regulatory process and emerging trends in sustainable fishing is a full-time job — one that most fishermen and women simply don't have the luxury to afford.

At the same time, it seems the communities we call home are becoming less aware of just how vital fishing is to our economy and our cultural heritage.

So when the four businesses that make up the Ocean Companies decided to come together to launch a new website, we wanted to make sure that we provided a foundation for communicating to both fishermen and the community. Because we are based in Grays Harbor County, we rallied around a shared battle cry: Keep Grays Harbor Fishing.

The four companies behind www.keepgraysharborfishing.com each represent different areas of the fishing industry.

- Ocean Gold Seafoods is a shoreside processor located in Westport.
- Ocean Protein is a fishmeal plant that opened in 2005. It was designed to fully utilize the fish that came into what is the fifth-largest port in the nation for edible landed catch.
- Ocean Cold is a 90,000-square-foot cold storage facility that has helped remove some of the seasonality from the fishing business.
- Ocean Express is a trucking company that transports everything

from equipment to fish.

We launched *www.keepgraysharborfishing.com* in order to provide a vehicle for communicating the three areas we believe are critical if we are to succeed in retaining a strong fishing community: Good jobs. Clean oceans. Strong communities.

• **Good jobs** means we need to make smart business decisions so that we can provide the support necessary for the fishing fleet to fish efficiently. This may mean something as simple as providing a vehicle for fishermen when they are in town so they can drive to the store to pick up supplies. It may mean sharing resources to help with repairs. Increasingly, however, we believe it also has to mean acting as a window into the regulatory and environmental processes.

In today's fishery, good information is just as critical as good gear. We have people who attend every single Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting. We have good relationships with the Department of Fish and Wildlife, and we work with environmental NGOs to provide industry insight into making recommendations on the introduction of sustainable fishing practices.

While we certainly have our own point of view on all of these areas, we think it is important to share that perspective with those who don't have the ability to always be at the table. Important decisions are made every year that impact our industry, and we all need to stay informed.

Our website provides links to important resources, and our soon-to-be launched eNewsletter provides an overview of decisions and trends we see coming.

• **Clean oceans** is another focus because we see it as the fishing industry's responsibility to make the right decisions that will help preserve the resources that allow us to fish for a living. Whether it's organizing beach cleanups or sharing insight with local schoolchildren about the fact that more than 85 percent of the world's sustainable fish comes from the U.S.A., we see it as our responsibility to walk the walk when it comes to sustainability. It's not enough to just follow the rules. We need to make a difference.

• **Strong communities** is the ultimate goal: A community of fishermen and our local coastal community here in Grays Harbor County. The more we can do to support these important communities, the stronger we all will be and the more likely we will be able to Keep Grays Harbor Fishing.

We support local events and provide scholarships for graduating seniors. We also

showcase other events and activities taking place in our area so that we can become a one-stop-shop for our community to find information about what is happening here. Because if it's in our backyard, it matters to us.

I've been in the fishing business for nearly 50 years. I've owned and operated boats. I've been a crab fisherman up and down our coast, into Alaska, down to the Gulf of Mexico, and as far away as Russia. My father was a fisherman and my kids are also in the fishing business.

Fishing has never been as complicated as it is now.

Our goal with *www.keepgraysharborfishing.com*

and with everything else we do is to be a trusted resource for both our fishing community and our local community.

We aren't going to sugarcoat anything. We may even disagree from time to time. But we are here and we share the same vision. We want to keep fishing. We're good at it. And we can't imagine doing anything else. ↓

Dennis Rydman is the president of Ocean Gold Seafoods, a shoreside processor in Westport and one of the four companies that joined together to create www.keepgraysharborfishing.com. He is a 50-year veteran of the fishing industry who most recently built the Ocean Gold Seafoods Pacific whiting operation.



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