

Taps drifting over carved marble stones. Tiny flags standing in smart ranks like an honor guard We come this day to remember those who fell. - David Lawson

VINEYARD GAZETTE ONLINE

Current Edition ▶ May 22, 2009 ▶ Article

70° F, Sunny on Martha's Vineyard ☀

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VINEYARD GAZETTE

Island of Martha's Vineyard, seven miles off southeast coast of Massachusetts.

Winter population: 15,882 in summer, 73,035.

Twenty miles from city of New Bedford, 80 miles from Boston and 150 miles from New York.

Devoted to the interest of the six towns on the Island of Martha's Vineyard, viz:

Edgartown, Oak Bluffs, Tisbury, West Tisbury, Chilmark, and Aquinnah.

These, with Gosnold, constitute Dukes County.

Martha's Vineyard's newspaper of record since 1846

Current Edition: Friday, May 22, 2009



Fishermen Gather to Celebrate Revival of Home Port, and Point Their Future

By SAM BUNGEY



photo by Peter Simon

Hope for an ailing Island commercial fishery was on the menu at the Home Port restaurant in Menemsha Wednesday night, along with some hearty chowder and fresh herb-crusted swordfish.

Most of the Island fishing community was on hand for the first annual meeting of the Martha's Vineyard Dukes County Fishermen's Association, along with representatives from Cape Cod and Maine.

Guest of honor was Tom Osmers. The longtime advocate for Vineyard community fishing was praised for his leadership and determination and credited with bringing promise to a local industry which has been in rapid decline in recent years.

He even got an ornamental codfish for his troubles.

"One guy, even though we told him he was crazy," said Chilmark selectman Warren Doty who hosted the evening, "one guy — Tom — he worked his butt off to make this happen."

The business of Wednesday night was to formally establish the fishermen's association, and all 72 fishermen who attended



Home Port owner Sarah Nixon with Karsten Larsen.

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automatically became members.

The group opened a bank account, appointed a board of directors and accepted a grant from the Edey Foundation, a local philanthropic entity.

Buddy Vanderhoop, who will serve on the board of directors for the group, spoke of the need for stricter regulations to govern 14 midwater trawlers currently taking herring on the Middle Ground and beyond.



Dennis Jason.

"Every fishery is going to go into decline in the next five years unless we do something about this," he said.

Mr. Doty, also a director, spoke against a proposed bill to outlaw the commercial sale of striped bass.

And during several speeches throughout the dinner Mr. Osmer urged wide-ranging action under the auspices of community-based fishing.

"Maybe it's permit banking, maybe it's suing the federal government, the commerce department," he said, "But we need to get this thing moving."



Scott McDowell.

Lifelong fisherman Dennis Jason said later he was energized by the potential for community fishing revival he heard in the speeches.

"I've been waiting decades for this," he said.

Program coordinator Laura Slifka from the Cape Cod Hook Fishermen's Association thanked Mr. Osmer for his work in helping to promote groundfishing.

"Tom is a great leader and he always gets people together," said Ms. Slifka, before presenting him with the metal codfish sculpture.



Johnny Hoy with his young daughter.

"Great, I'll hang this on the wall — the codfather," quipped Mr. Osmer.

While others wrote it off as a lost cause, Mr. Osmer spent years attending meetings and networking with fisheries across the state to keep Martha's Vineyard in the conversation on the future of the industry.

And when the possibility of establishing the Vineyard's own groundfish sector came up in 2007, he wrote an application longhand, trekking to Portland, Me., to deliver it in time to meet the deadline.

The result is the Martha's Vineyard Independent Sector, one of 17 groundfish sectors in the region.

Though these are early days (the New England fishing management council must grant the sector legal status in June and there is a deadline of Sept. 1 for a management plan) and the full implications are unclear, the sector designation may give fishing communities power to wrest control from restrictive individual regulations imposed by the federal government.

Fishermen from around New England would be able to tie into the sector, as long as they agree to abide by management rules and hold a groundfishing permit.



Chris Murphy.

"Tom's sector maybe the only thing available in New England for the likes of us," said Ted Ames at the dinner.

Mr. Ames is a Penobscot, Me., fishing advocate and recent recipient of a MacArthur genius grant.



Janet Messineo.

"The only way we're going to protect fisheries is if we all act together . . . Ben Franklin said it best: we can hang together or hang separately," he said.

With a new federal administration beginning to focus on local management, said Mr. Doty, change is in the air.

"Tom would always be bothering me and I felt, go do what you want to do, Tom, but I'm going to do something else with my afternoon," he told the Gazette. "That was my approach in those days. But what has changed is the administration; they're interested in community fisheries management quotas and catch shares and they're going to go that way whether you like it or not. Tom was already there."

The fishermen's group has yet to come down on either side of the sector issue, but at least two directors on the five-member board are firmly in favor of it.

"I've decided I'm interested in this and I'm gong to try to make it happen," said Mr. Doty yesterday.

Wednesday night was also the first official opening of the Home Port doors since Sarah and Robert Nixon bought the restaurant last month, There was something else that brought the fishermen together on Wednesday night, as Mr. Doty observed.

"You want to get fishermen together? Free food," he said, "We could get 72 fishermen in here every night."

Mrs. Nixon served mixed berry shortcakes and pecan pie for dessert.

"Do some rosaries for us!" she asked the fishermen, imploring them to return to the restaurant as customers as least once over the summer.

Adding that the restaurant would be open for any meetings of the fishermen's group, Mrs. Nixon pleased the assembled with her own pledge to obtain the necessary permitting to buy catch direct from local fishermen.

"There's some paperwork to do but Robert and I want to do whatever we can to make that happen," she said.

Working the room after dinner, Mr. Osmers delivered his clear vision to the assembled fishing community.

"What happened tonight is we hit a champagne bottle on the bow of the ship," he said. "So fishing stays alive; we're trying to make a more community-based, artisanal, hook and line, non-intrusive, fishing community. We're taking in the weary and the downtrodden."

Mr. Osmers stuck doggedly to the "we" pronoun even as he described his solo work in creating the Vineyard sector.

"This is a great thing," he coached as he shook hands and patted the backs of departing fishermen at the end of the evening. "We've got something started."

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Dennis Jason Jr. (left), Greg Mayhew.



Serious about ensuring future of fishery.

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