

New Bedford's first marine expo considered a triumph

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NEW BEDFORD, Mass. — A sold out Commercial Marine Expo, a major marine trade show, held in New Bedford for the first time this year helped put the city on the conference and trade show map, according to city officials.

The expo brought thousands of people, mainly in the marine trades, to State Pier and was highly praised by attendees. It was the first year the show, formerly named the Fish Expo Atlantic, was held in New Bedford, having moved there from Providence.

Show director Ted Hugger told the Standard-Times that the city turned out to be perfect for the show.

"People kept saying this is where it ought to be," he said. "You look out at any of the doors here and all you see is fishing boats."

About 2,500 and 3,000 attendees visited the expo over the two days it ran, an increase over past shows.

Organizers received a number of positive comments from exhibitors about the friendliness and helpfulness of city residents, whether it was pointing out how to get somewhere or giving someone a ride back to his hotel, Hugger said.

"That kind of stuff is really valuable, and that's what makes exhibitors want to come back," he said.

This was the first time the State Pier was home to a convention style event, according to Harbor Development Commission Executive Director Kristin Decas said who stressed that the city needed to do the job right. Decas credited both Hugger's foresight in being able to see what State Pier could be and his willingness to take a gamble that the city would be able to get it done.

"I think this particular (event) put us on the map," she said.

While the expo was in town and attention was on the fishing industry, the city also announced a fund-raising campaign to support litigation challenging new fishing regulations.

Monies raised for the new fund, called the American Seafood Defense Fund, will help finance needed discovery, research and other legal work in the challenge against sector management and catch shares fishing regulations. The fund will be managed by the HDC.

"The fund will help pay expenses and some of the support services for litigation," explained New Bedford Mayor Scott Lang. "I think there's an awful lot of discovery documents and different information to process and this will allow the lawyers to work in a much more effective way."

Still in its infancy, there are no target amounts set, Decas said. "We're out on the campaign trail saying no contribution is too small," she said.

The federal lawsuit against National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration was filed last month by the cities of New Bedford and Gloucester, the state's two largest fishing ports, along with private fishing interests from Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and

North Carolina. The suit names the Administrator of NOAA and the Secretary of Commerce as defendants.

The lawsuit opposes sector management, a version of NOAA's "catch share" national management initiative, which local fishing officials say could force commercial boat owners out of business and shrink the fishing fleet from 600 active vessels down to as few as 100 to 200.

Also, during the June 9-10 marine expo, three longtime fishing industry advocates were honored with awards presented by Lang. Receiving Professional Mariners Award in perpetuity were Captain Martin Manley and Howard W. Nickerson, both awarded posthumously. The 2010 award recipient was Harriet Didriksen.

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