

## Ebb & Flow: New bank a big help for fishermen

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A new kind of bank — a community permit bank — opened in Gloucester last month. It has already benefited the local groundfishery community, and it will offer greater future returns. Fishermen who have already used the bank give it, and the man behind it, the thumbs up.

Vito Giacalone, the groundfish fleet's longtime trusted and accomplished technocrat and industry advocate, sprang to action two years ago after he sensed the fleet in town, already downsized, was quickly unraveling. Losing more fishing time to Framework 42's 2-for-1 days-at-sea system, and the likelihood of having to surrender a traditional fishing ground off of Gloucester to a pair of liquid natural gas terminals exacerbated the tail spin.

"Many fishermen had enough, and Gloucester was losing fishing permits left and right," said Giacalone, also a groundfisherman and vessel owner. Weary of years of intensifying fish regulations and opting not to buy more expensive days-at-sea to survive the new 2-for-1 system, some fishermen sold their boats and permits to out-of-town interests.

Giacalone soon came up with a remedy to at least keep the permits in Gloucester and help preserve what was left of its groundfish fleet. His solution first acquired mitigation capital from one of the LNG companies and then established the nonprofit Gloucester Fishing Community Preservation Fund.

"A group of four of us run the fund. We are local community people. The fund also has a fishermen's advisory committee," explained Giacalone, who is the fund's executive director.

The fund used the mitigation money to set up and run a community permit bank which has so far bought 21 fishing permits from mostly small and medium-sized local vessels and leased their approximately 1,000 days at sea to 65 qualified local and out-of-town fishermen who primarily have a history of landing fish and doing business in Gloucester.

"We will still need (days at sea) in sectors," added Giacalone. Sectors will be the way of regulating the Northeast groundfishery in two to three years' time.

"The main idea behind this program is to strengthen and preserve the fishing community," Giacalone explained. "The fishing community is more than just the fishing boat. It's also the people, their homes and their schools.

"The program is not about attracting vessels from other ports," he said. "We are not out there advertising: Look, if you land your fish in Gloucester, we'll give you days at sea." Several out-of-town port representatives later came down hard on Giacalone for that very reason.

Fishermen paid the fund an administrative fee for each day at sea, which ranged from only \$50 to \$100 per day, depending upon the vessel size. "The reason for the administrative fee is to just keep the program self-sufficient. One hundred percent of the mitigation money is going toward permit acquisitions," Giacalone explained.

The group believed that rather than handing out the mitigation capital directly to the fishermen, leveraging the money to provide re-occurring benefits would be the best way to keep the community whole.

The infant fund began leasing its days in early February, two months before most of the inshore grounds close and three months before the groundfishing year officially ends on April 30. The leasing began in time for those fishermen to further cash in on this winter's good weather and also the cod catches on and around Middlebank off Gloucester. The National Marine Fisheries Service stopped processing day-at-sea leases March 1 for the remainder of this fishing year. The days will be available for leasing again during the next fishing year.

"The fishermen were notified of this program through a mailing, and they came to us," Giacalone stated. He, along with Paula Ryan, the program coordinator, helped the eligible ones fill out the necessary paperwork, which was later forwarded to the National Marine Fisheries Service in Gloucester for completion of the leasing process. "NMFS did a great job processing the leases. They just pounded them out," said Giacalone.

How do some of the people using the bank feel about it and Giacalone?

"It's a good deal. I would be out of days at sea for this fishing year without this program," said Dennis O'Connell from Rockport, who paid only \$50 a day for more days at sea through the fund to keep his approximately 40-foot groundfish dragger, Lady Elaine, fishing longer this year. While waiting to hear from the fund, O'Connell leased some days at sea from an outside party for \$200 per day.

"Most inshore guys are using up 12 hours a day out fishing, so that's one 24-hour day with the 2-for-1 days at sea system," said Darin Hart, captain of the 42-foot Gloucester gillnetter Comet. Hart also leased days through this new program.

Craig Porter added, "I went outside and leased days at sea earlier for \$300 a day. I got these from the fund for \$100 a day." Porter alternatively skips the 55-foot Gloucester gillnetters Manifold L. Porter and Kenneth J. Duncan.

"Vito did a good job; otherwise, I would have been out of a job. I went out of town earlier to lease additional days at sea and nothing else was available for my size boat," said Tony Giacalone, owner and operator of the medium-size Gloucester groundfish dragger, Caterina G. Additional days at sea to lease for medium- and large-size vessels are harder to come by and more expensive than those for small vessels.

"Because of Vito we got a good deal with the days at sea. Last year, I leased days at sea for my 40-foot dragger for \$200 to \$300 a day. These cost me \$50 a day through the bank," said John DelTorchio, owner of the Ruth D. He added, "That Vito is really a bright guy. If it wasn't for him coming up with one good plan after the other and getting these approved by people in power, we'd (the fishermen) be in tougher shape — no question." The Ruth D's captain, Dave Goetemann, added, "Just about everyone leasing a day at sea now has Vito to thank for it."

"This was just a pilot program. We are in our infancy. We strive to improve it for the future," said Giacalone. The fund also plans to buy additional permits for the bank.

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#### Photos



The Gloucester Fishing Community Preservation Fund's executive director, Vito Giacalone, and program coordinator, Paula Ryan, tend to business at its Gloucester office.