



## NOT YOUR TYPICAL FISH STORY



*Coho harvest means more food  
on shelf for North County Food Bank*

By DAVE FISHER • The Citizen

As fish stories go, this isn't your typical tale. It's not about the big one that got away or the boatload of fishers who caught their limit in a few hours at sea.

But it is a good story just the same.

Just ask Bill Campbell or Mike Ehlen who, for the second year in a row, helped spearhead a volunteer effort to transport hatchery-produced coho salmon at the end of their life cycle to Garibaldi to be processed and canned for the North County Food Bank in Wheeler.

"It's just the kind of thing that makes everyone involved feel good," said Campbell, a resident of Manzanita, who in retirement remains active and dedicated to helping out where he can.

The effort, which Campbell hopes to continue as an annual event, began last year when Joe Watkins, manager of the Nehalem Fish Hatchery, contacted North County Food Bank President Imie Camelli about the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's coho harvest program.

In short, ODFW makes available to food banks across the state surplus coho for distribution to those in need.

Camelli, in a conversation with Campbell, lamented that she had been contacted by the hatchery, but didn't have the volunteer resources or capability to receive and process the fish.

"I asked her if I could give it a shot on behalf of the food bank," said Campbell. "The answer was 'yes.'" And the rest is history.

Campbell was quick to enlist the help of Ehlen, a Nesbakahnie resident, and Darus Peake, owner of the Tillamook Bay Boathouse, a licensed food-processing facility in Garibaldi. Last fall, with the help of volunteers and the blessing of ODFW, the local food bank received 1,129 cans of coho fillets. Everyone was ecstatic.

That was last year.

This year, Campbell and Ehlen are having a hard time keeping track of the number of fish they have transported from the Waterhouse Falls fish trap on the Nehalem North Fork a few miles upstream from the hatchery, to the Tillamook Bay Boathouse cannery in Garibaldi.

On Monday, Oct. 11, as the three- to four-week window for migrating coho drew to a close, Campbell and Ehlen, expected to pick up 25 fish their first trip. It turned out to be 54. By day's end, 101 coho had been harvested.

"It's a new daily record," Ehlen exclaimed.

September and early October rainfall helped the cause, said Derek Wiley of ODFW and the OSU Life-cycle Monitoring Project that with other agencies and citizen involvement looks to restore healthy salmon populations and their watersheds.

Wiley is the go-to guy who advised Campbell and Ehlen on the run and which days activity was taking



Above: Volunteer Greg Gasser, at left, watches Derek Wiley of ODFW measure a hatchery-raised coho salmon taken from the trap. At right: Cannery employees at the Tillamook Bay Boathouse in Garibaldi fillet and process the salmon transported from the North Fork.

Photos by  
Dave Fisher





# FISH STORY: Fundraising effort helps pay for coho processing



Above left: ODFW personnel work the fish trap. Above right: The rapids on the North Fork of the Nehalem are more pronounced with fall rains. Below left: ODFW's Derek Wiley measures a coho salmon taken from the Waterhouse Falls fish trap. At right: For volunteer Mike Ehlen it's just another day in paradise living on the Oregon coast. Photos by Dave Fisher



Continued from page 1

place. "It's a good run this year," he said. "Better than last year...and good-sized fish."

All agreed, the coho are larger this year, simply bigger fish, and until recently have been, for the most part bright chrome in color.

Characterizing the ODFW team effort, Campbell is most appreciative. "The coordination with ODFW has just been terrific."

As fish made their way upstream this fall, those that entered the fish ladder were examined and measured for size. For hatchery coho it was the end of the line. Native salmon were released to continue their journey.

"The fish came about as early as early as they come this year," said Ehlen, "and they appeared to be bigger."

Averaging more than 17 pounds per fish, Ehlen and Campbell were excited about a greater yield this year. At last count, over 680 fish 200 from the hatchery itself, had been harvested, translating into upwards of 6,000 cans (7.5-oz. in size) of fish. In addition, 20 salmon fillets prepared by the Boathouse were delivered to the Nehalem Bay House and Kilchis House assisted living facilities.

Having got their feet wet last year Campbell and Ehlen streamlined the process this time around transporting whole fish on ice to Garibaldi. Last season, the fish were cleaned on-site at the fish trap consuming more volunteer hours.

"We thought setting up a cleaning station in the area of the trap last year was the best approach," said Campbell, "but we modified that this year with the placement of ice boxes and twice daily transport to the Boathouse... much more efficient

and faster, saving all hands extra hours and work."

While volunteers still play a key role, the number needed isn't as great this year. "The operation is so efficient, we've been able to get by with fewer volunteers," Campbell said.

Also new this year is a fundraising effort to help pay for the cleaning and processing of the fish at the Tillamook Bay Boathouse.

still the director of community development for Tillamook County. With the help of Campbell, Peake expanded into the canning business when an Ilwaco, Wash. cannery decided to call it quits. He purchased the equipment and set up his own operation, in the process creating more jobs in Tillamook County.

A stickler for quality, Peake is proud of the product the Tillamook Bay Boathouse produces for the food bank. "This is from boneless/skinless salmon fillets," unlike some canned salmon that comes with bones and skin on.

Looking to expedite the process at his end, he was also eager to get the canned salmon to the food bank as quickly as possible. "We need to get it in the hands of the people that need it."

At the North County Food Bank, the final stop on the road, Imie Camelli is grateful for the new food source and the volunteer effort that makes

it happen.

"Obviously, we're not set up to handle whole fish. This works out well with very little cost to the food bank," she said.

It's a busy time of year for the food bank that serves families from the Tillamook/Clatsop county border south to Twin Rocks, and donations help keep the shelves full for distribution.

The North County Food Bank is open every Tuesday from 1 to 3 p.m. to serve clients. Donations of food are accepted Tuesday morning through noon or by appointment. To learn more, call the food bank at (503) 368-7724.

Cash donations are welcome as well, and may be sent to North County Food Bank, P.O. Box 162, Wheeler, Or. 97147.



Volunteer Bill Campbell and North County Food Bank president Imie Camelli celebrate the result.

"The fish came about as early as early as they come this year, and they appeared to be bigger."

Volunteer  
Mike Ehlen

Tillamook Bay Boathouse, where the proprietors, Peake and Cum Holtz, have pledged to process the fish at \$1.50 per can, their cost. So far, roughly \$3,500 (and counting) has been raised to help cover costs.

Interestingly, Peake and Campbell became acquainted three and a half years ago when Campbell was