

# FISHTOWN PRESERVATION

SPRING/SUMMER 2018


FISHTOWN, MICHIGAN Volume 12 • No. 1

Assuring public access to Fishtown and maintaining its historical integrity, working waterfront, and stories through preservation, education, and stewardship.



Cover photo: See page 11





Father and son, Alan and Joel Petersen set trap nets from the *Joy* near Leland, May 2017. The Petersen family has had a commercial fishing operation in Muskegon since 1927. Alan sometimes helps Joel in Leland, where Joel is also the captain of the *Joy*.

PHOTO BY RAQUEL JIMENEZ

# OF FISHERMEN AND ANCHORS

By Amanda Holmes, FPS Executive Director

## WHO WILL KEEP WATCH?

Blustery and unpredictable November is no time to be on Lake Michigan in an open trap net boat, but the Petersens had no choice. The catch had been sparse until October, the very end of whitefish season, and they still had ten nets out to try to fill their quota. Ten nets is a demanding number to tend, especially as the weather worsened with fall—and then Alan had suffered a stroke, and they'd pushed the boat full-throttle just to get him back to shore. He was home from the hospital now, but the family was far behind in lifting out their nets for the season.

That's why, on the day before last Thanksgiving, I was sitting with Alan and his father, Ken, ashore in Muskegon, waiting. Alan, looking pale, was barred from the boat until after surgery in December, and Ken—everybody calls him Gootz—was, at 87, now past his fishing days. We were in Gootz's house, in a room with a big picture window looking toward the pier, all of us waiting for the phone call that would tell us the boys were coming in.

The Petersen Fisheries is home to Joel Petersen, captain of Fishtown's *Joy*. Alan is his father, and out on the *Buddy B* were three more Petersens: Joel, Alan's brother Bill, and

Bill's son (and thus Joel's cousin) Eric. Gootz is the family patriarch and not prone to ornamentation. This is a room for working fishermen, with a sheet over the couch to keep it clean, plain, Formica-topped tables, and, hanging from the white walls, some framed photographs of family and fishing boats—some theirs, some they just like.

Gootz had a percolator of coffee ready to go, but he wasn't going to plug it in until he'd gotten word the boat was on its way back. He paced and looked out the window toward the gray water beneath gray skies, and I understood that wanting the coffee to be at its hottest was hardly the only reason he was waiting for the phone to ring. If the boys needed help on the water, Alan and Gootz were ready to give it, regardless of health or age. When Gootz stood in front of the glass door, his cap purposeful on his head and his hands tucked into the pockets of his zipped-up jacket, he for some reason reminded me of a lighthouse—a still figure casting a steady, reliable eye across the changeable waters.

I'd wanted to interview Alan and Gootz for years because they're Joel's family. Fishtown Preservation is about preserving the fish as well as the town of our name, and Petersen Fisheries

is connected to us not only because Joel is our captain but also because about a quarter of the fish sold at Carlson's Fishery comes from them. Petersen Fisheries goes four generations deep and is a living part of the once much larger brotherhood of Great Lakes commercial fishing—small, family-focused, multi-generational—that it is Fishtown's mission to record and support. Now I had my recorder on the table, turned on, but all of us were distracted. We kept glancing at the slow-moving clock on the wall and then back out the window. Sometimes your most valuable role is simply to be ready, and to keep watch.

Our Fishtown has such people, too. Some of them we call our Fishtown Anchors. Our Anchors commit to support Fishtown Preservation not only with a substantial sum (our Anchors pledge from \$500 up to \$20,000), but also to repeat that sum each year. This pledge program, now in its tenth year, is a practical recognition that Fishtown will continue to need our help into the future. It's a commitment to be ready—and to keep watch.

At 3:30 the phone finally rang, and a moment later Gootz was carrying out a box with the coffee pot and cups. He percolated the coffee in the fish house next to the dock, waiting for the boat to arrive. Soon after, when Joel opened the door, bringing in the sharp smell of cold air, lake-sodden trap nets and diesel fuel, he carried a steaming yellow mug of coffee.

Soon I left the fishermen—four of them, including Alan—to the chilly task of spooling, hosing clean and packing the *Buddy B's* nets into giant storage boxes. On my way out of town, to join my family for Thanksgiving, I passed the rubble

of Muskegon's old Sappi paper mill, whose final stage of demolition had just put end to the mill's 70-year history. The old mill was making way for a new mixed-use development of residences, retail and recreation. This is a forward-looking economic use, but also one that will inevitably displace and erase yet another piece of Muskegon's shared past.

Days like this one remind me to be grateful for Fishtown, which means to be grateful for our Great Lakes commercial fishermen and the supporters of Fishtown Preservation. I thank our Anchors especially, whose foundation of support is a reassurance and a stamp of faith. I know not everybody can make a substantial gift each year, but if such a commitment is possible for you, I invite you to join us as an Anchor. We need people who will remain ready. Who will keep watch for us.

I also thank our commercial fishermen, who bring whitefish to shore for all to enjoy. I'm happy to be able to tell you that Alan's surgery went well; in fact, he told me he feels more energetic than he's felt in years. When I saw him last November he was, beneath his good spirits, a bit thin and cautious. "Well," he said to reassure me, "I'm still here!" But I'm chagrined that it was his stroke that finally shocked me into doing the interview with him that I'd long planned but never quite scheduled.

It's too easy to put aside even what matters most to us. Fishtown is alive and vibrant, but only because of the help you give. Things do change and time does pass, but these inescapable facts redouble our determination that we will never lose Fishtown.

**Not on our watch. ■**

PHOTOS BY AMANDA HOLMES



Joy Captain Joel Petersen and his father Alan Petersen at work in Muskegon.



Eric Petersen and his father Bill hose a trap net freshly retrieved from Lake Michigan on November 22, 2017, while Joel and his father Alan gather it into a container for end of the season storage.



# THE BIG MOMENT

By Amanda Holmes, FPS Executive Director

## I WOKE UP WITH A SENSE OF ANTICIPATION.

As with so many other midwinter Mondays the day was cold, gray and slushy, but February 6, 2017, was going to be a special day. I drove that morning not to the Fishtown Preservation office in Leland but to Suttons Bay, to the branch of Chemical Bank. I parked on the opposite side of the street, but town was so quiet I barely needed to check for cars as I crossed.

Usually Alicia helped me with banking business, but the size of this withdrawal required a few more steps and a little waiting. When it arrived, the check was the largest I'd ever seen in person: \$352,963.54. This sum would pay the first of two large balloon payments Fishtown Preservation had agreed to when we'd purchased the Carlson Fishery property ten years before. For a decade this sum had loomed over every committee and board meeting and over every letter we'd written to Fishtown's supporters. There was another, even larger balloon payment still ahead, but at least we could now relieve ourselves of one substantial monthly loan payment. It was a big moment for Fishtown.

I carried the check for only the couple of minutes, enough time to walk down the block to the Fifth Third Bank branch. I took the big check to the teller and began to hand it across—but shouldn't I do something to mark this moment? I took out my phone and snapped a few photographs of the check sitting on the counter, with the bank logo and the teller's hand in the background. And then she took the check and after a moment handed me a receipt, and that was it.

I walked back out onto the gray streets of Suttons Bay. Now I was going to drive to the office to a staff meeting and an altogether ordinary day. I'd expected this day would be a highlight of 2017, but instead I felt sort of deflated.

It's too bad Janice Sue doesn't work at this branch anymore, I thought. She would've appreciated this moment. After all, Janice Sue Steffens Kiessel has a history with Fishtown, which is why our tug *Janice Sue* is named after her.

Remembering Janice Sue made me realize eventually that the simple bank transaction I'd captured in my hasty photograph was not, in fact, the Big Moment. In the same way the number in that check was the sum of many smaller donations—of individual decisions made at countless kitchen tables—the biggest moments in Fishtown

are the accumulation of numberless smaller moments. We preserve Fishtown not in one morning, but in the work and love we give every day.

That work continues. We still face the second, larger balloon payment due next year, and on the ground we must rehabilitate three buildings—Carlson's Fishery, the Cheese Shanty and, on the south side, the Morris Shanty that has recently entered into our care—and we must take care of some significant infrastructure issues to resolve problems with water flow and to improve public access to Fishtown. We need your help with these practical steps to preserve Fishtown.

However, we can't and won't forget that these practical steps serve a larger purpose, because preserving Fishtown is about the future. Frances Hall reminded me of this on a gray day last August. Our youngest Anchor, Frances hadn't been able to make our special Anchor event in May, but I always love to spend time with our Anchors. When I offered her a tour of Fishtown, including the shanties and both the *Joy* and *Janice Sue*, she was enthusiastic; after all, her gifts are dedicated to maintaining the boats. She wasn't as enthusiastic about being accompanied by her parents and younger sister, Louise—but it seemed prudent, since Frances is only three. Her father and mother, Evan and Anne, are like many Fishtown parents who want to pass along their love of Fishtown to their children. They've just started earlier than most.

The air that day was heavy and hazy with what turned out to be the first signs of the deluge that arrived a few hours later (and, incidentally, reminded us of our need to fix the water flow through Fishtown!). It was a great tour, though. We wandered for more than an hour. *Joy's* captain, Joel Petersen, gave the tour of the boats. Frances and Louise shared the vinyl boat seats, even on *Janice Sue*, where the seat had been laid on the lower deck. In honor of the visit and Fishtown, Frances wore a Tug Stuff sweatshirt, in bright pink.

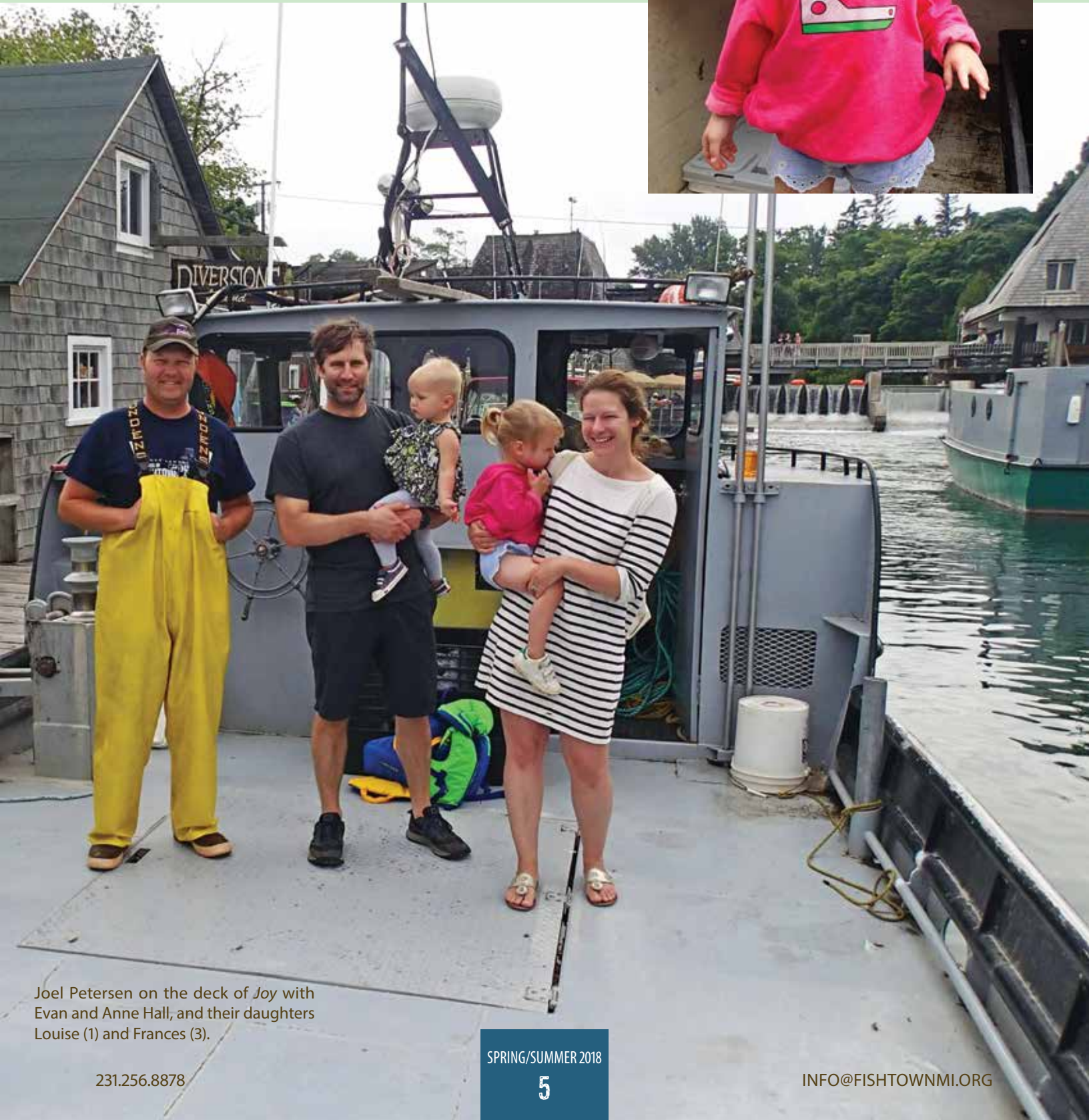
It was just one summer afternoon—a small moment. The great privilege of working where I do, though, is that I'm able to see some of these moments, and who knows where such moments may lead and what they may become?

**I invite you to join me for moments like these. And bring the kids. ■**

Our youngest Anchor, Frances Hall, on her tour of Fishtown, including the shanties and both the *Joy* and *Janice Sue*. She was quite enthusiastic, as her gifts help maintain the boats. ▶



PHOTOS BY AMANDA HOLMES



Joel Petersen on the deck of *Joy* with Evan and Anne Hall, and their daughters Louise (1) and Frances (3).



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*An anchor's purpose is to keep something in place, to provide stability and a solid presence.*

**Fishtown Anchors** are those individuals/families who have pledged to donate a minimum of \$500 each year to support and lend stability to Fishtown's operating fund.

**Fishtown Business Anchors** pledge to donate annually at three level options: Gold \$1000, Silver \$500 and Bronze \$250.

Fishtown preservation is a forever project, but there is no time like the present to give! Complete and send in the attached envelope, sign-up online at [FishtownMI.org](http://FishtownMI.org) or call 231-256-8878.

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#### 2017 5K Sponsors

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Meggen Watt Photography  
A Friend of Fishtown  
Richmond Architects



# Fishtown Preservation Society **Honoraria & Memorials**

## GIFTS GIVEN IN HONOR OF

**DEC 1, 2017–MAR 31, 2018**

**Barbara Beeker**

Caroline Brady

**Sally Bracken**

J. Frederic and Elizabeth  
Bracken Wiese

**Sandy Bracken**

J. Frederic and Elizabeth  
Bracken Wiese

**Will Bracken**

J. Frederic and Elizabeth  
Bracken Wiese

**Mike Brown**

Laurie Kay Sommers

**Biscuit Burnham**

Marceil Johnson

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Gary and Mary Burnham Curtis

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**Jim and Elizabeth Fisher**

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**Jeff and Nancy Fisher**

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**Jerrold and Lisa Fisher**

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**Norbert and Paula Gits**

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**Bill and Debbie Lipner**

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**Oakland Southfield Physicians**

Oakland Southfield Staff

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**Ann and Warren Watkins**

Laura G. Paine

**Rink Wheeler**

Mike and Lynn Pendergast Hayes

**Joanie and Randy Woods**

Michael J. and Dawn Fisher

## GIFTS GIVEN IN MEMORY OF

**DEC 1, 2017–MAR 31, 2018**

**Amy Chatfield**

Joanie and Randy Woods

**Sylvia Cordes**

Victor J. Cordes II

**Carole Eberly**

Walter Kraimer

**Judy Elsey**

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**Charley Freeman**

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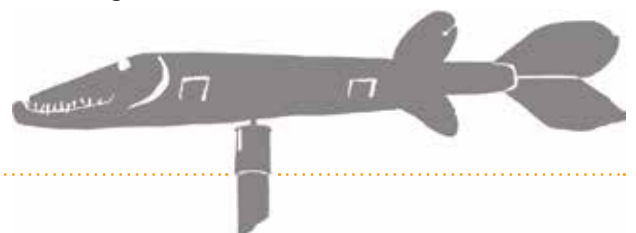
PHOTO BY MARSHA BRUNETT



## Signs of Spring

Malcolm Chatfield (*right*), owner of **Main Street Gallery** on Main Street, Leland—and a Fishtown Business Anchor—is getting ready for the season by hanging a new sign in Fishtown for his wife, Chrissy Chatfield, owner of **Tug Stuff**—also a Fishtown Business Anchor.

Our Business Anchors (*details on page 7*) understand how important Fishtown is to the region. They are vital to the preservation and maintenance of our shanties, provide operational stability, keep *Joy* and *Janice Sue* actively commercial fishing and ensure that Fishtown is here for future generations. If you are interested in becoming a Fishtown Business Anchor sign-up online at [FishtownMI.org](http://FishtownMI.org) or call 231-256-8878.



*Thank you to our donors.  
You make Fishtown possible.*

*We have made every effort to ensure the accuracy of all contributions,  
including tribute gifts. Please notify us of any errors or omissions.*



## Fishtown JOY Sparkling Wine

Last fall, we teamed up with Larry Mawby in creating our first wine label—after our beloved fishing tug, *Joy*. It received rave reviews after being introduced by Joy Lang Anderson at the “Comfort and Joy” party held in Fishtown last October. JOY was a hit through the holidays for gifting and parties, and continues to be so. It is a dry, white, sparkling wine—a joyful blend of pinot noir and chardonnay grapes. Two dollars from every bottle sold is being donated by L Mawby to help preserve Fishtown. Share some JOY this summer; at special events, weddings and with your friends.

### Available at these locations:

- Burritt’s Market – W Front Street, Traverse City
- Hansen Foods – Suttons Bay
- L Mawby Vineyard – Suttons Bay or online at L Mawby.com
- Leland Mercantile – Leland
- Shady Lane Markets – M-22, south of Suttons Bay

## The Annual Friends of Fishtown 5K is Celebrating its 10th year!

**Saturday, July 21 • 9am**

**Register by June 30 to save \$5 and ensure t-shirt size: [FishtownMI.org](http://FishtownMI.org)**

The Fishtown 5K is an annual tradition for many of our Fishtown friends. Winding through Leland’s neighborhoods and along the Leland River, the course starts and finishes in the heart of Fishtown. This is an event for the whole family—serious runners, walkers, strollers, and leashed dogs are all welcome.



### “Year of the Tug” Costume Awards

We had so much fun last year with the “Year of the Dog,” that we’ve dubbed this year the “Year of the Tug.” In addition to our amazing race medals awarded to top racers, medals will also be given for best tug costumes and the first three tugs to cross the finish line. Join us in wearing tug costumes in Leland’s 4th of July parade—to help us celebrate our local fishing heritage and promote the Fishtown 5K. Visit [FishtownMI.org](http://FishtownMI.org) for tug costume workshop dates in June and July.

## What’s new at the Welcome Center?

Stop by the Fishtown Welcome Center to see new exhibits that focus on commercial fishing—the fishing grounds, the fish caught, the commercial fishing vessels and the fishermen, as well as a special tribute to Ross Lang.

You’ll also find new merchandise in the gift section at the Welcome Center, with all proceeds benefiting Fishtown Preservation. *See you soon!*





PHOTO BY AMANDA HOLMES

# FISHTOWN COUNTDOWN TO 2019

Starting from scratch, since 2007, Fishtown Preservation has created an effective and successful historic preservation organization. We have:

- Paid the first of two installments of the debt incurred with the 2007 acquisition of our Fishtown properties (February 2007)
- Paid the debt incurred with the 2016 property purchase of the south side of the Leland River (January 2017)
- Completed several major planning and research projects
- Maintained and rehabilitated most of the shanties
- Continued renting the shanties for retail operations (following accepted principles of adaptive reuse)
- Installed interpretive exhibits
- Opened the Fishtown Welcome Center
- Improved infrastructure
- Restored commercial fishing operations from our docks

Over the years we have told our supporters about site and shanty work to be done and the mortgages we have on Fishtown. In February 2019 we will pay off the second and largest of the two, but we need your help. Details of a capital campaign to help us deal with our most pressing projects and needs will be announced soon. In the meantime know that the funds will:

- Pay the final installment of the Carlson family notes
- Rehabilitate the Fishery, Cheeses Shanty and south side Morris Shanty
- Resolve infrastructure issues related to water flow and improve public access to Fishtown

With these things accomplished and a growing Anchor program, Fishtown Preservation will be poised for the incredible opportunities ahead. Fishtown Preservation now has nearly 600 active annual contributors including 150 “Anchors”—individuals and businesses who have committed to ongoing support of our Annual Fund.

**Please know that we appreciate what your generosity makes possible.**

**On the cover:** Joel Petersen is a fourth generation commercial fisherman from Muskegon. He took to fishing at an early age, captured here at 11. Now 38, he fishes in both Muskegon and Leland, and hopes to inspire a new generation of young fishermen to learn and love commercial fishing by sharing his skills and knowledge of this traditional industry.

Fishtown Preservation Society, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, is made up of a dedicated staff and community volunteers who have come together to preserve and protect Fishtown.

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Joel Petersen (*Joy*)  
Alan Priest (*Janice Sue*)

Raquel Jimenez photographed this sunrise on May 27, 2017, her first trip out on the *Joy* as a Fishtown Preservation summer intern.

