

A fisherman wearing a cap and a dark shirt is holding a large crab on the deck of a boat. In the background, other people are visible on the boat, and the water is blue.

2021 AAPA Communications Awards Program

Entry Classification:
Community Outreach

Entry Title:
**Westport's
Fresh Catch**



Port of Grays Harbor

On Washington's Pacific Coast

Summary

The Westport Marina, a facility of the Port of Grays Harbor, is the number one commercial seafood landing port in Washington State. The surrounding South Beach area is also a tourist and recreation destination that has experienced record numbers of visitors during the pandemic. In the midst of deep COVID impacts to local fisherman, the Westport Marina partnered with the City of Westport to launch Westport's Fresh Catch to connect local and visiting seafood consumers to the fresh, local seafood coming across the docks.



Westport Marina

Washington's Premier Fishing Location

A FACILITY OF THE  PORT OF GRAYS HARBOR



1. Challenge & Opportunity

The Westport Marina is a 550-slip commercial and recreational fishing hub on Washington State's Pacific Coast. It is home to 5 major seafood buying and processing facilities, one of the largest cold storage facilities on the West Coast, nearly 200 homeported commercial fishing vessels, and hundreds of transient boats coming from all parts of the West Coast. Simply put, the Westport Marina is the heart of Washington State's fishing industry and a national leader of seafood landings with exports to nearly 90 countries around the globe.



The South Beach region has experienced unprecedented numbers of both visitors and folks relocating to the area since the beginning of the pandemic. While Westport has always served as a tourism hub, the influx of visitors far surpassed any previous peak season, resulting in nearly double the traffic to the state parks, campgrounds at capacity, and daily traffic to the region at all-time highs according to traffic counts. Boaters displaced from

closed marinas, locals exploring their own back yards and road trippers coming from all over the region resulted in a swell of new faces all interested in information on the community, specifically Westport's unique working waterfront and the boatloads of fish being landed right before their eyes.

Challenge #1

By March of 2020, in the wake of the pandemic spreading across the globe, only small market demand for fresh crab existed. International shipping restrictions, the closure of restaurants, casinos, hotels, and the hospitality industry all but eliminated the demand for fresh seafood. Millions of pounds of valuable crab had no place to go, resulting in dismal prices and a stalled fishing economy.

Furthermore, fishermen anticipated similar impacts to other commercial fisheries such as salmon, albacore tuna, and oysters. In Westport, most fishermen traditionally rely on large processing facilities to move their product to market. Without their ability to buy, sell, store, and ship many fishermen sat with few options to move their product to market. The traditional wholesale supply chain provided minimal opportunity for fishermen, who began seeking ways to create their own markets, reach consumers, and sell their catch directly to the public.

Challenge #2

Make no mistake, fresh seafood is crossing the docks year-round in Westport but there was little information on how or where to get it. Marina staff, local business and restaurant workers, and even the local chamber of commerce were constantly fielding questions on the topic by both community members and tourists. There was a clear need to communicate this vital information about Westport's abundant seafood to the benefit of both the consumer and fisherman alike.

Opportunity

In light of these challenges, the Westport Marina and the City of Westport teamed up to launch the Westport's Fresh Catch Project. Changes to market demands and changing consumer sentiment toward food sources provided the perfect opportunity to educate, showcase and communicate to both locals and visitors what Westport's local, commercial seafood industry had to offer and exactly where it could be found right in the Marina District. The program aimed to positively benefit and impact visitors, community members, local businesses, and our fishermen.

Through vibrant signage in the Marina District, thriving additions and improvements to the City's marketing campaign, website, and social media, the Westport's Fresh Catch project hit the mark for putting local seafood in the hands of consumers, growing interest in local seafood and communicating critical information to the public.

While Westport's Fresh Catch addressed an immediate need induced by the pandemic, it also created a platform for a long-term relationship between the local fishing community and consumers interested in purchasing quality, local seafood at the source.



The Westport Marina is the hub of commercial and recreational fishing on Washington State's Pacific Coast. The South Beach region is also a major draw for recreation including camping, surfing, jet skiing, and beachcombing. Westport's Fresh Catch has played a vital role in connecting everyone to fresh, local seafood in the busy Marina District that serves as a tourist destination in itself but is also a true working waterfront.

2. Port of Grays Harbor Mission

The Port of Grays Harbor's Mission is "to best utilize our resources to facilitate, enhance and stimulate **international trade, economic development and tourism** for the betterment of the region."

Those three bolded terms are, in a nutshell, what the Port of Grays Harbor does.

Of the Port's seven lines of business, the Westport Marina is the lone port facility that brings together and achieves all three focus areas of the Mission daily. The Westport Marina is the hub of commercial, tribal, and recreational fishing and boater-based tourism on Washington's Coast. Westport's Fresh Catch directly supports the Port's mission by promoting and stimulating economic activity and tourism in the region by directly connecting fishermen with seafood consumers. The Marina's upland properties support an industry of processors and cold storage facilities that employ hundreds full-time and thousands during peak season. Furthermore, as an obvious boost to international trade, the millions of pounds of seafood landed and processed in Westport is shipped all over the World, with Westport-based processors reporting exports to more than 90 countries.



The Port of Grays Harbor is incredibly proud of how Westport's Fresh Catch initiative has spurred economic activity for the region during this unprecedented time by directly benefitting local businesses and fishermen, all while taking advantage of an increase in tourism for our rural area.

3. Planning & Programming

Creating a clear, consistent message about available seafood and where to buy was not a simple task. With dozens of species, multiple harvest techniques, and many independently owned and operated fishing businesses, the need for concise and accurate communication was critical.

Outreach to direct-to-consumer fish-sellers specializing in tuna, crab, halibut, and other species helped guide the development of signage outlining all sellers in the marina. Inspired by recent commercial fishing communications put forward by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), the seasonal fish wheel was developed and adapted to highlight Westport's primary fisheries with their corresponding seasons and link the products and sellers by color-coding.



The seasonal fish wheel highlights the prominent species landed commercially in Westport and the months in which they are harvested. The colors correspond to the individual sellers who identify which species they sell. For example, a fisherman who sells tuna will have a yellow dot on their plaque, matching the seasonal species wheel. The wheel is both on the website and on a very large sign at the Marina's main float with additional information on where to purchase in-season seafood.

Simultaneously, the City of Westport approved a plan to incorporate commercial fishing & seafood information into their tourism and marketing strategy. The plan added a new page to the already popular experiencewestport.com site. The information included seafood sellers, product offerings, seafood market information, and general information about the value and significance of Westport's seafood industry.

Because the City of Westport's tourism arm, Experience Westport, already had a well-established web and social media presence, and because the Port of Grays Harbor does not yet have social media, utilizing the City's existing communication channels was yet another partnering opportunity.

Project Components:

Westport's Fresh Catch campaign currently consists of the following, with additional video production slated throughout the year:

Website – [Westport's Fresh Catch — Experience Westport, Washington](#)

Facebook page - [Westport's Fresh Catch | Facebook](#)

Video 1 - [Westport's Fresh Catch - Dungeness Crab - YouTube](#)

Video 2 - [Westport's Fresh Catch - Seafood Markets - YouTube](#)

Video 3 – Tuna (to be released 3rd Quarter 2021)

Video 4 – Salmon (to be released 4th Quarter 2021)

Video 5 – Groundfish (to be released 1st Quarter 2022)

Signage - Replacing an antiquated and out of date 25-year old sign, the Westport's Fresh Catch seasonal fish wheel was incorporated into a large sign, along with additional information as to where consumers can purchase fresh seafood including markets and direct from fishermen, right off their boats on the docks.



A before and after look at the Marina District Esplanade signage that helps guide seafood consumers to what is in season and exactly where they can find it by a vibrant, color-coded wheel.

Partners Make it Possible

As a county-wide, rural port district with limited resources, the Port prides itself on community partnerships and leveraging funding opportunities. Westport's Fresh Catch is a combined effort of multiple agencies and organizations all working toward one common solution, for the betterment of the community. Vision, skills, capital, and administrative roles were shared by multiple organizations to move the project forward to completion.

Catch Invest: Catch Together is a Fisherman-focused non-profit organization that funded the construction of the new seafood sign and was a catalyst for funding the development of the project.

City of Westport/Experience Westport is the key partner in funding the development and implementation of commercial fishing & seafood into the City of Westport's tourism arm, Experience Westport. Their campaign includes educational videos, social media coverage, and website development.

Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife served as the trusted resource for fishery information and seasonal wheel concept for the project. WDFW helped amplify the message of Fresh Catch through agency outreach, press releases, and the Washington Seafood Campaign.

Fishermen - As the force behind the resource, this project wouldn't have been possible without the local fishermen's participation. Many fishermen, on several occasions, have been willing to provide photo ops, accommodate ride-alongs, review and critique information, and provide a consistently superior product to the markets. Currently, twelve independent fishermen are listed on the Fresh Catch sign and website, with dozens expressing their support and appreciation for positively representing and sharing the importance of their livelihood.



Local Seafood Markets - Merino's Seafood, Brady's Oysters, and Seafood Connection consistently provided photo opportunities, product donations for shoots, and remain a trustworthy source for local seafood or when boats aren't selling.

Capture.Share.Repeat. is the local marketing business that delivered exceptional video and photography services, far and above their contract obligations, highlighting Westport's Working Waterfront, communicating the project goals through visual means, and concisely relaying a large amount of information through graphics, videos, and storytelling.

Westport Marina spear-headed and administered the project from envisioning the original Westport's Fresh Catch concept to overseeing the design, implementation, and communication with the fishing community. Marina staff assembled a local team of partners who helped to secure funding for the signage and brought forward the proposal to the City of Westport for consideration and partnership.

Objectives

1. **Develop a clear, concise message** – Pairing back a plethora of useful seafood and commercial fishing information to a few key themes universal to all spectrums of the industry
2. **Educate consumers on products available seasonally** – use the “seasonal fish wheel” to visually explain the seasonality of local seafood
3. **Improve visual aesthetics of the Westport Marina waterfront with new Signage** – replace the 25-year old “seafood bulletin board” with the new Westport's Fresh Catch sign
4. **Connect fishermen and consumers through credible information** – The Fresh Catch Landing Page provides a one-stop-shop for information on available seafood as well as the contact information, business names, product offerings of local fishermen specializing in direct-to-consumer sales

Target Audiences

While the impetus of the project was to reach inquiring tourists visiting the community, the need to reach many locals with the same information was identified through the planning process. Many local folks wanting to support their local fishermen were unsure of exactly how to do so.



4. Actions

While many needs within the Westport Marina district exist, it was the coalescing of COVID-19 impacts, heightened public interest in seafood, and a short-term grant funding opportunity that propelled this project forward. Marina staff, City staff, and fishermen recognized the opportunity, worked quickly, and secured results far beyond expectations.

Timeline:

March-May 2020:	Identify problem, gauge need, and garner fishermen and business support and participation
June 2020:	Westport's Fresh Catch Project Concept & Branding Development
	Applied for COVID-19 relief grant funding through Catch Together for the new marina signage
	Partner with City of Westport Lodging Tax Advisory Committee to fund an 18-month marketing campaign comprised of new Fresh Catch Landing Page development, social media coverage, and 5 short videos
July 2020:	Received grant funding from Catch Together
August 2020:	Launched new landing page on Experience Westport website; launched 1st of 5 videos
December 2020:	Fresh Catch sign fabrication and installation complete near Main Dock in the Marina District
May 2021:	Launched 2 nd of 5 videos

5. Outcomes & Evaluation

While Westport's Fresh Catch is still in its infancy, the results and feedback have been most encouraging. Specific results for each component of the campaign are as follows:

Website – After only 10 months, the Westport's Fresh Catch page is already the second most visited page on experiencewestport.com, only beat by the popular webcam page. The Fresh Catch page's average viewing time is 5:57 minutes.

[Westport's Fresh Catch — Experience Westport, Washington](#)

Facebook - Over 1,000 followers

[Westport's Fresh Catch | Facebook](#)

Video 1 – Combined views of over 57,000 across all platforms, 1000 Facebook shares, 225 comments

[Westport's Fresh Catch - Dungeness Crab - YouTube](#)

Video 2 – The second video of the series was just launched on YouTube on May 31st, and had not yet been shared via social media but was already viewed 125 times in just 3 days.

[Westport's Fresh Catch - Seafood Markets - YouTube](#)

Marina District Sign – While we don't have specific data for the number of locals and visitors that stop by the Fresh Catch sign at the floats in the Marina District, it has absolutely become a focal point and gathering spot. Marina office staff, local business and restaurant workers are all excited to point folks to the new sign.

Local restaurant, Blue Buoy, stated, "We love the new sign our port has installed at the marina! Curious about when and where to purchase local seafood? Check it out!".

"We were looking at this sign Monday or Tuesday. It's awesome. The colors, attention to detail, all the info some of tourists ask. Now I can send them to the sign," shared another Westport business owner.

Additional feedback from local fishermen and business owners about the overall program:

"I have been so pleased to see the creation of the Westport Fresh Catch initiative come to life. The information on the website, as well as the local signage are very well presented. Bringing Westport's seafood bounty to the local population is rewarding. We love to share seafood. Thanks to everyone involved for making Westport's Fresh Catch a reality!" -Mike Cornman owner- Westport Seafood Inc., Merino's Seafood Market, f/v Tani Rae

"As a new boat and business owner, I needed help letting people know they could purchase fresh seafood directly from me, the fisherman. The Fresh Catch Program was the perfect platform for that. I have felt the benefit myself through the growth of my business but have also watched other fishermen benefit as well. It's important that the public is not only be educated on the product landed in Westport, but also how buying this product directly from local fishermen and seafood markets benefits our community." -Perry Graham f/v Amber Lynn

Conclusion

Thanks to committed partners all coming together and pulling in the same direction for the benefit of the community, Westport's Fresh Catch initiative has been highly successful in communicating, educating and connecting visitors and our local community with fresh local seafood, to the benefit of our fishermen and local businesses that were facing uncertain times due to the pandemic. The Port of Grays Harbor and our partners are excited and dedicated to growing Westport's Fresh Catch for years to come.



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