

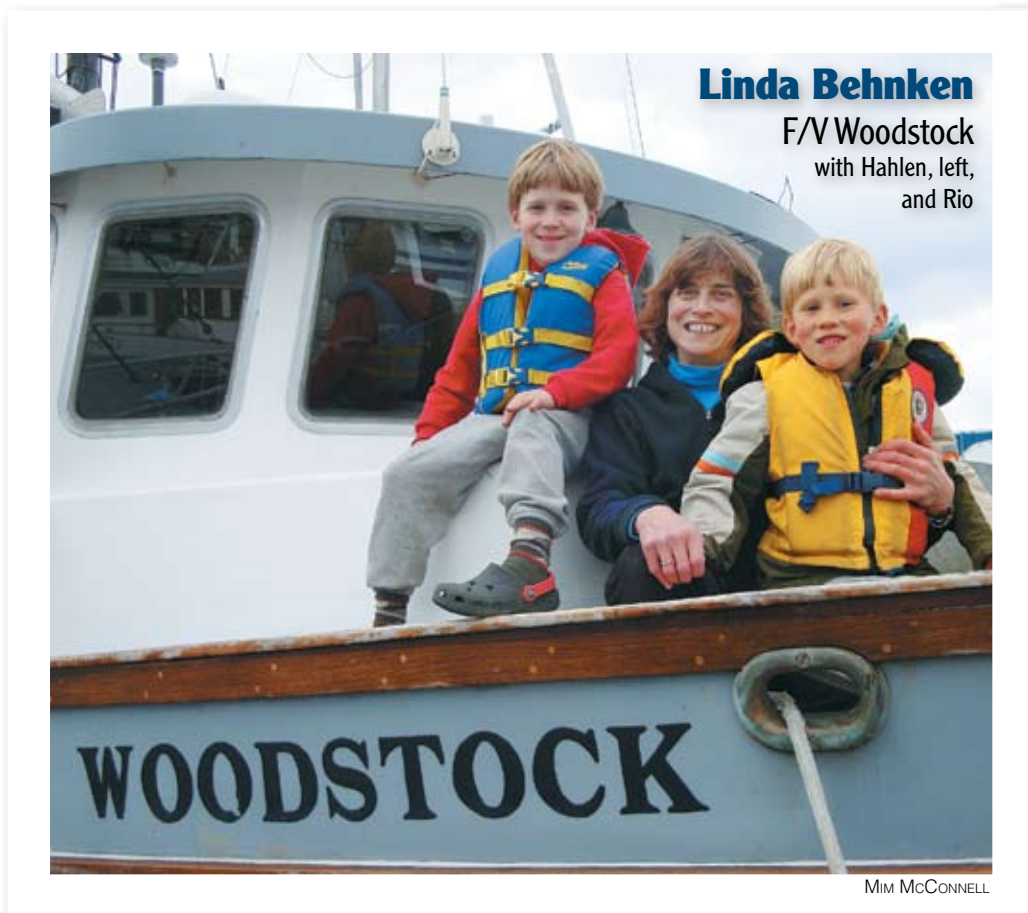
National Fisherman's

Nothing about fishing is getting easier, other than getting out of it, yet we continue to find people who thrive on it and wouldn't do anything else.

People like Joel Kawahara of Quilcene, Wash., who is confronting the challenges of the West Coast salmon fishery head on. Or like Linda Behnken of Sitka, Alaska, who understands the intimate connection between communities and ecosystems. Or like Kevin Ganley of Bainbridge, Wash. In a business where you're lucky to keep a crew for a season, guys stay with Ganley for a generation.

What do they share? Total commitment to the notion that individuals make a difference. Willingness to walk the fine line between naïveté and despair. And determination to do whatever it takes, afloat, ashore, or in the meeting room.

We proudly present *National Fisherman's* 2009 Highliners.
— Jerry Fraser



Linda Behnken
F/V Woodstock
with Hahlen, left,
and Rio

MIM MCCONNELL

Learn and live

Linda Behnken, Sitka, Alaska

Whether she's running the 40-foot Woodstock to a secret waypoint for halibut or blackcod, parenting her two boys or sifting through tall stacks of paperwork, Linda Behnken doesn't dwell much on looking back.

Not that she doesn't glance to the aft deck to check that the scuppers are clear or pause for retrospect after fisheries laws have been passed, but life on the water has taught Behnken, 48, to maintain forward momentum even if she's not exactly sure what lies over the horizon.

"A lot of it is jumping in with both feet and figuring it out as you go," says Behnken, who fishes longline gear for blackcod and halibut, and trolls for salmon out of Sitka.

If that adage has worked well enough in explaining Behnken's breadth of experience in the fisheries over the years, it has served her even better in the role of establishing fisheries policy. In addition to rigging the Woodstock to troll for salmon

during summer, converting it to fish her quota shares for blackcod and halibut, and maintaining the boat during the rest of the year, Behnken finds time to play a hefty role in Alaska's fisheries science and management.

She served as a member of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council from 1992 to 2001. She has been executive director of the Sitka-based Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association since 1991 and continues to serve in the Halibut Coalition, an ALFA offshoot. Most recently, Behnken committed to become a collaborating investigator with a task force devoted to documenting interactions between sperm whales and longline gear.

"She loves being on the water and loves fishing," says longtime fishing friend and fellow ALFA board member Dan Falvey of Sitka. "But she also realizes how important fishing is to the communities and has devoted her life to both."

The seeds to her involvement in fisher-

ies issues were planted in the 1970s when she earned a degree in forestry and English from Dartmouth. Freshly out of school and seeking adventure far from her home state of Connecticut, she arrived at Sitka on the state ferry in 1982. Though the environs surrounding Sitka offer no shortage of trees to interest a forestry graduate, the ocean and fishing gripped Behnken.

She immediately began pounding the docks for deckhand jobs.

"It took a month of walking the docks before I got my first fishing job," she says.

That job was on a family-owned boat, longlining for blackcod. Ex-vessel prices that year were just 29 cents a pound.

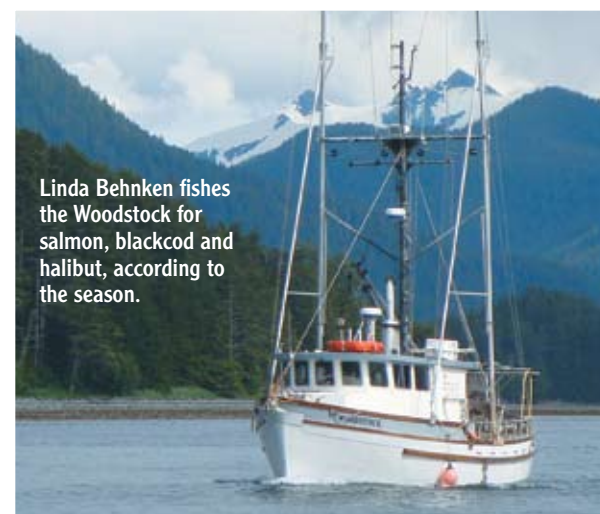
"I didn't earn much money that summer," says Behnken. "But I loved the fishing community and the lifestyle."

Behnken's life as a

deckhand led to leasing boats and a definitive day that would propel her to buy her own trolling operation.

"I can remember getting up one morning, running the boat, putting the gear in the water, and I said, 'I can do this on my own.'"

With that, she bought the wooden troller Fantasia, renamed it the Morgan and focused her efforts on catching and



Linda Behnken fishes the Woodstock for salmon, blackcod and halibut, according to the season.

MIM MCCONNELL

2009 Highliners



Joel Kawahara
F/V Karolee

GREG FRIEDRICHS



Kevin Ganley
F/V American Beauty

KEVIN GANLEY

selling her salmon. Like the sea meets the sky to form the horizon, Behnken quickly learned that the commercial fishing lifestyle and advocating for its sustainability go hand in hand. To that end, she entered Yale in 1988 and emerged two years later with a master's degree in environmental science, the focus of which was angled sharply toward fisheries management, economic policy and law.

Behnken wasted no time putting her education to work: In 1991, she began working for ALFA. The following year, Alaska Gov. Wally Hickel nominated her as a member on the North Pacific council, where she served as a member until 2001.

"It was quite an education," she says of her early years on the council. "You have a whole lot of people depending on you to represent them and represent them well."

Adding poignancy to Behnken's appointment to the council was that she arrived in time to work on the controversial IFQ program for halibut and blackcod, which debuted in 1995. Falvey says Behnken worked hard on provisions that address vessel length limits, consolidation

of quota share blocks and other aspects of the program.

"It's not perfect," Behnken says of the IFQ program. "But I believe that the program was essential in stopping some of the problems with derby fishing. I've lost a few friends, and you couldn't fish those derby years and not have a few close calls yourself."

These days, Behnken divides her time between her work on fisheries issues, fishing, her family — and running marathons

Zest for the long haul Kevin Ganley, Bainbridge, Wash.

Kevin Ganley has skippered the same Alaska pollock trawler since 1986. He took the helm of the American Beauty when he was just 26 years old and since then he has consistently held a reputation as a top highliner in the Bering Sea fleet. Now 49, his friends and colleagues say he maintains the enthusiasm and energy of someone half his age.

Ganley grew up in Old Saybrook,

to "keep me sane." She married Kent Barkhau in 1998, and the two have made a life fishing with their sons, Hahlen and Rio.

"They both love fishing," says Behnken, adding that their trips aboard the Woodstock offer many skills that should serve the boys later in life.

"The main thing, I think, is self-reliance. You've got to be able to stay calm through the emergencies, fix things as they break." — *Charlie Ess*

Conn., and was obsessed with commercial fishing from his early childhood. By the time he was 15, he had been working on a dragger as a half-share long enough that he was able to buy an F250 pickup. He walked into the Ford dealership with \$4,400 in cash, but they wouldn't sell him the truck. He didn't even have a learner's permit yet. He had to come back with his mother and put the truck in her name.

Then he drove it up and down the driveway until he could get out on the roads.

By the end of high school Ganley had been reading *National Fisherman* for years and decided Alaska was where the action was. After graduation, he packed his truck and drove up. He says, "My family is all white-collar. They were very disappointed I didn't stay in school."

He walked the docks in Kodiak until he landed a job on the deck of a scallop boat. Within a year he had taken a job on another scallop boat, owned by Bob Freese, and then moved into the wheelhouse. The next year he took over Freese's cod trawler the Tam-Ran. At the age of 20 he was running a 90-foot boat. "Back then I knew everything there was to know. You couldn't tell me anything," he says.

He took over a succession of larger trawlers, then in 1986 he was offered the job aboard the 123-foot American Beauty, which was built in Seattle by Marco in 1979 and owned by Golden Alaska Seafoods. On the Beauty he assembled a crew that he kept for most of the next 23 years.

You'd think something would have to give, the same boat, the same crew, the

Cover story

same company, the same fishery, for an awfully long time.

When the fishery switched from an Olympic style to individual quotas in 1999, Ganley and his crew went from making as many as 15 sets a day to making two or three. Would it be he's just left it on autopilot for the last 10 years?

It would not. "He's a driver," says Randy Freese, the "Ran" in Tam-Ran, who worked with Ganley for more than 20 years. "He's always tweaking the gear."

Indeed, says his boss, Lou Flemming,

the president of Golden Alaska, "He's always looking for a better way."

"He doesn't know the meaning of the word quit," says Bob Magnuson, who now runs his own boat but fished with Ganley for nearly 20 years.

"He's got the driver personality," says Dale Raymond, the mate and relief captain aboard the American Beauty, who has been there all 23 years with Ganley. "He can't sit still." It starts to sound like a broken record. Every time you talk to somebody about Ganley you hear the same

things over and over. But at least the point is clear, Kevin Ganley is driven to catch fish. As a hobby, he even spent 14 years commercial rod and reel fishing for tuna, between pollock seasons. And he still spends much of his free time sportfishing on his 46-foot boat in Florida.

Randy Freese says quite a bit of

the competitive excitement left the pollock fishery when the quotas came in, but Ganley still attacks each day with the same enthusiasm. "If somebody is catching 5 more tons a trip, he's busy adjusting bridles and setback."

Another quality of Ganley everyone comments on is his attention to detail when it comes to maintaining the boat. Says Raymond, "It's one thing to know how to catch 'em, but if your equipment doesn't work that doesn't matter."

"He's meticulous," says Randy Freese. "He's a freakin' yacht guy."

At this point it's starting to sound like Ganley has ice in his veins, and Raymond does say, "He never loses his cool." But he adds, "He's a huge practical joke guy. You've got to stay on your toes." And goes on to say, "He's one of the best entertain-

ers I know," Randy Freese says, "All the vendors you deal with, he's always very kind and courteous. The Cat guys come down and it's always like a luau."

In February of 2008 the Pacific Glacier, a fish processor with a crew of more than 100, caught fire. Ganley steamed up alongside and tied the American Beauty to the burning ship, remaining there until the crew was evacuated and the fire was extinguished.

"He'll do whatever it takes," Randy Freese says. "No fear, no screaming, no arguing. But Kevin's never lost anybody, or even hurt anybody."

"It's one of those boats you don't want to leave. There is nothing better."

Raymond can't imagine leaving the boat. "How could you go up?" he asks.

— Abner Kingman



Some fishermen jump from boat to boat, but Kevin Ganley has skippered the American Beauty since 1986.

KEVIN GANLEY

Solitary, but not in outlook Joel Kawahara, Quilcene, Wash.

Joel Kawahara is a four-state salmon troller. The 54-year-old lives in Quilcene, Wash., on Puget Sound, and fishes Washington, Oregon, California and Alaska. Depending on the year, he will

fish two or three states. Most recently he has been fishing Washington and Alaska.

His boat, the Karolee, is a 42-foot, horseshoe stern, Douglas fir-planked troller. It was built in the Jacobsen yard

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in Seattle in 1944. Kawahara bought the boat in 1987 and is the fourth owner.

On the water Kawahara is somewhat solitary. When in the lower 48 he fishes single-handed and often chooses ground away from the cluster of trollers that inevitably forms over the fish. Dave Bitts, a longtime friend who has fished onboard the Karolee with Kawahara in Alaska, and near Kawahara while on his own boat in California, says, "He tends not to want to get in the middle of the fleet."

Kawahara says, "I tend to think salmon can be found more places than underneath somebody else's boat."

Bitts says Kawahara is a talented fisherman, but his salmon landings are not what set him apart from the rest of the fleet. "Let's say there are a hundred guys in California who are trying to make a living salmon fishing. He's about in the middle."

What sets Kawahara apart is his tireless advocacy on behalf of the fishery. He is actively involved with the Pacific Fishery Management Council Habitat Committee, the Washington Trollers Association, the Alaska Trollers Association, and Save Our Wild Salmon. Jim Olsen, the vice president of the Washington Trollers Association says, "There are some people who are doers and some people who are users. Joel is a doer. For the fishing industry he

goes 100 percent."

Bitts says, "He has sacrificed a lot for his political activity, a lot of his livelihood for the common good. When guys who've done a little bit of work for the fishery, guys who know how hard it is, when they see how much Joel does, their eyes get kind of wide."

"When I'm fishing I spend a lot of time brooding about how it's going to be better, how do we make it better for the coming years," Kawahara says. "I go from, 'How do I catch a lot of fish this trip?' to 'How am I going to do it in a few years?' Shortsightedness doesn't get you anywhere in business."

As solitary and reserved as he is on the water, Kawahara wades directly into the fray when he is carrying the torch for the fishery. Bitts says, "He's very persistent and very well prepared, and you better have your facts well marshaled if you come up against him."

"Yeah... it's different," Kawahara says, "but you gotta do what you gotta do."

You can trace the two sides of Kawahara back to his youth. He grew up in Seattle as the middle of three brothers and the son a tackle store owner. His father had a fisheries degree and was active in advocating for the protection of water quality in salmon spawning rivers. He took the boys fishing

from a very early age, but encouraged them to find work outside of fishing.

Kawahara's older brother became an engineer, and Kawahara graduated from the University of Washington in 1978 with a degree in physics and mathematics. He then went to Alaska and fished with his father on a troller that the old man had bought. But his father kept nagging at him to get another job, maybe become an engineer like his brother. So Kawahara went back the University of Washington and earned a second degree, this time in electrical engineering. He graduated in 1984 and took a job at Boeing. But he started getting itchy. He bought the Karolee in 1987 and fished during his free time. By 1991 he quit his job at Boeing and went salmon fishing full time.

In 1992 Kawahara started dabbling in Alaska salmon issues, and from there his participation in fisheries politics snowballed. Now Kawahara says every day of his time off the water is spent working on

Although something of a loner aboard the Karolee, concern for fellow fishermen is the core of Joel Kawahara's advocacy.

AMY GRONDIN



one salmon issue or another.

"You can always count on Joel," Olsen says, "He has a capability to work with everybody, to bring people together. If something needs to be written, he is the first to put his hand up."

Kawahara says his background allows him to communicate with fisheries biologists and make his way through technical documents. But it is his tireless motivation, driven by a desire to protect the salmon fishery for the future, that sets him apart. Bitts sums him up by saying simply, "He is a man of principle."

— Abner Kingman



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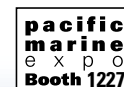


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