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Alaska Fishing Industry Sends Help to Japan Fishing Fleets

Group targets projects to help fleets return to fishing, starts with lifejackets

The Alaska Fishing Industry Relief Mission (AFIRM) has begun delivering aid to help fishing fleets of Northern Japan affected by last year's tsunamis.

"We were told from the outset that there would be at least a year before affected communities could respond to the basics of life and complete planning to be ready to identify meaningful projects," said AFIRM Chairman Larry Cotter. "In the meantime we raised approximately \$380,000 and attempted to establish communications through the Japanese fishing cooperatives, consular office, and processor network. We're up and running and looking to deliver help from the Alaska fishing industry to our counterparts in Japan."

Vancouver-based artist and filmmaker Linda Ohama had worked with a similar effort of the British Columbia fishing community, and contacted AFIRM to relay an urgent request from a small boat fleet near Sendai that was ready to get back fishing, but only lacked lifejackets. AFIRM sent the group \$5,500 to get them back on the water.

"This was a very small request monetarily, but we couldn't overlook the symbolism and were happy to help. We understand Ms. Ohama will be returning to the area this summer and we look forward to hearing back on projects for specific needs in small boat fleets where we can help," said Cotter. "In the meantime, AFIRM is supporting a suite of projects with the Ishinomaki Fish Market that serves as a regional delivery center for affected fleets."

The group plans to send \$136,500 to purchase a three ton capacity forklift and mid-size truck for use in the regional fish market, and a fish processing training simulator use for the Miyagi fishery high school to help provide the workforce to support deliveries by fleets in the tsunami affected region.

AFIRM, a 501(c) (3) non-profit charity, was first formed to assist the Gulf fishing communities following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005 and was re-activated for the tsunami relief effort. AFIRM has zero overhead given its volunteer board and staff, so 100% of all contributions will go directly for assistance. All donations to AFIRM are 100% tax deductible.

More information is available at AFIRM's website at www.akjapanhelp.org.

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