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Alaska Fishing Industry Sends Help to Japan Fishing Fleets

Seafood industry group funds ten projects to help fleets return to fishing after 2011 Tsunami

The Alaska Fishing Industry Relief Mission (AFIRM) has identified and funded ten requests from Northern Japan fishing fleets affected by last year's tsunamis, to deliver over \$375,000 in donations from Alaska seafood processors and fishermen. AFIRM initiated the relief fund shortly after the March 2011 tsunami devastated the fishing communities of Northern Japan.

Seattle-based Unisea, American Seafoods, and Glacier Fish Company inspired donations from their vessel, plant and office employees and then matched them, effectively doubling the industry's grassroots fundraising efforts. The Bering Sea crab and groundfish fleets responded with major donations collected from vessels and skippers, including a fundraiser in Hawaii featuring fishermen from the Discovery Channel's popular Deadliest Catch TV series.

The complete list of projects funded by AFIRM in Japan includes:

- \$5,500 to the Sendai branch of the Miyagi Fishermen's Cooperative for lifejackets that were the last remaining obstacle for thirty families to their return to fishing.
- \$136,500 to the Ishinomaki Fish Market for 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.
- \$9,000 to Naburi Chiku to purchase lifejackets and equipment for 30 fishing families;
- \$38,000 to Mori Ju Gyogyo Corp for a fixed net and supplies for 10 families;
- \$46,000 to Onagawa Uoichiba Co. for 60 storage tanks for up to 800 fishermen;
- \$5,700 to Miyagi Fishermen's Association for two small fishing boats for 23 families;
- \$64,000 to Haragama Kisen for required safety equipment such as lifejackets, ropes, helmets, and pumps, for 250 fishermen;
- \$28,000 to Taro-cho Fishermen's Organization for air conditioners for a seaweed sorting plant for 50 fishermen.
- \$10,000 to Shin Otsuchi Fishermen's Organization for purchase of five electric dock winches to replace hand powered winches for up to 250 fishermen.
- AFIRM pledged its remaining funds, \$30,000 to partially fund a request by Iwaki Fishermen's Organization, Hisanohama Branch, for rebuilding the destroyed

Iwaki Fish Market, pending the community's ability to raise remaining funds needed to complete the project.

All in all, over 190 fishing and processing industry participants donated over \$375,000 with the purpose of helping the affected fishing industry of northeastern Japan rebuild their fishing and processing infrastructure.

“American Seafoods is pleased to participate in this extremely important and worthwhile effort to provide much-needed equipment to those who continue to recover from the effects of the devastating tsunami,” said American Seafoods Company President Inge Andreassen.

The group identified eight projects in August and September, added to two that were funded earlier in the year. Nine of the projects were identified by Vancouver-based filmmaker Linda Ohama who was in contact with AFIRM after successfully helping a similar effort from British Columbia's fishing industry. Ohama has been in the region and meeting with local fisheries cooperatives this summer, and translated and coordinated requests, on a purely volunteer basis. AFIRM's leadership has been committed to all-volunteer operations to provide 100% of donations collected directly to relief efforts with zero administrative overhead, in this and its previous effort responding to the Gulf of Mexico fishing industry's devastation from hurricanes in 2005.



Sendai fishermen with lifejackets from AFIRM Courtesy of Linda Ohama

“The Alaska fishing industry including fishermen and processors were eager to offer help after the March 2011 Tsunami. AFIRM collected funds with the intent to provide help that would get fishing families back to fishing. We are extremely grateful for the help from Linda Ohama who traveled to the affected region and kept in close touch with AFIRM to identify opportunities to help, and translate their requests, on a purely volunteer basis from her sincere desire to help,” said AFIRM Chairman Larry Cotter.

“AFIRM was inspired by Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and Alaska seafood industry contacts 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

all volunteer board and staff, so 100% of all contributions are used directly for assistance. AFIRM is not actively fundraising at this time, but will retain its board and structure for future efforts where the fishing industry needs help after major natural disasters,” said Cotter.

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

More information is available about Linda Ohama at <http://www.whitepinepictures.com/seeds/i/8/biography.html> .

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