

Still Fishing Amanda Holmes, Administrative Director

THOSE WHO VISIT THE HARBORS OF LAKE MICHIGAN most often see sailboats and pleasure craft lining the docks. Working fish tugs are a rare sight, particularly because of the gradual decline of commercial fishing and working waterfronts in the Great Lakes. At the docks in Fishtown, visitors have long enjoyed seeing the *Joy* and the *Janice Sue*, the trap net and gill net tugs which have been and will continue to be an integral part of Fishtown.

It had been several years, however, since the two tugs left the Fishtown dock—so long, in fact, that this summer I overheard several people ask if the *Joy* and the *Janice Sue* are museum exhibits, reflecting a bygone era of Fishtown's history. The tugs remained at the docks only because the Fishtown Preservation Society (FPS) has been sorting out the details of operating a fishery, as well as updating the vessels' equipment to meet U.S. Coast Guard standards and insurance requirements.

On September 24th both tugs did something that they had not done in a long while—they headed out onto the open water of Lake Michigan. Both tugs were required to have a dry-dock hull inspection, and the easiest way to do this was to take them via water from Leland around the tip of the Leelanau Peninsula to the Northport Bay Boat Yard.

As soon as I left the harbor aboard the *Janice Sue* that morning, I realized that, despite all of my conversations and research about Fishtown, I too had come to think of the boats as stationary dock-side objects. But to watch the shore recede and the wake span out behind the tug, and to see the *Joy* keeping pace beside us, was an unexpectedly moving experience. I eyed the water, the shore and the islands. I absorbed the peacefulness of the lake, the distance from the demands of the land that I imagine drew fishermen out onto the water again and again as much as the fish that was their livelihood.

The trip was not without its mishaps. Apparently, when the *Janice Sue*'s diesel has not been running full-throttle for some time it may backfire and blow a hole in the exhaust pipe, but that just provided a good excuse for the three of us aboard to hang out the open doors and hatch in the fresh, early-autumn air. I've heard many stories about queasy first trips on the *Janice Sue* and expected the same for myself, but I did not get ill from the rolling of the tug, the constant loud pounding of the engine,



After the trip to Northport, fishermen Alan Priest, Jerry Vanlandschoot, Andrew Miller, and Joe Petersen aboard the *Janice Sue*.

or the thick diesel air.

The *Janice Sue* and the *Joy* were captained by Alan Priest and Andrew Miller, both eager to resume their places at the helms of the tugs after too many years away. On board the *Joy* were two fishermen from well-known fishing families on the Great Lakes, Jerry Vanlandschoot from Munising and Joe Petersen from Muskegon, both of whom may help FPS operate the *Joy* when she is ready to go out for whitefish again. From a distance I watched them gauge the waters and the movement of the tug, avid fishermen taking a day off from their respective fisheries to test new waters. A fisherman's holiday, perhaps.

Once back on shore we focused again on the matter at hand—the hull inspection—and watched as the tugs were lifted from the water. Just as the intensive site study for the Master Plan has exposed foundations-to-rafters work that needs to be done to the Fishtown buildings, the dry-dock inspections of the *Joy* and *Janice Sue* have exposed a weighty list of work the tugs require if we are to preserve them. The inspection revealed, among other things, considerable rust, some cracks, pitting, and an unreinforced keel.

Boats can be difficult objects to preserve, and the few work boats that survive long enough to be considered historic often require expensive maintenance. Even though they have been worked hard over the decades, the *Joy* and the *Janice Sue* are in reasonably good shape. Leaving the rust unchecked and untreated, however, would consign them to the scrapyard within ten years. Work on the tugs now—removal of old paint and rust, structural stabilization and welding, and durable sealants—will ensure their survival and operation long into the future.

The *Joy* and the *Janice Sue* are treasures that belong in Fishtown and need to be kept fishing. The fact is, there are not as many fishing tugs on the Great Lakes as there used to be. A few tugs are actually museum exhibits, displayed on land with platforms built around them. Fishtown offers a rare opportunity for people to see tugs up close at the dock, coming and going from the harbor, and more significantly, actually fishing.

The *Joy* and *Janice Sue* and the entirety of Fishtown embody memories and traditions that are distinct to Leland, but that also represent a maritime continuum of greater significance than we yet realize. These boats will still be fishing.

CREDITS

Unless otherwise noted, all photos courtesy of Amanda Holmes.

Page 2: Ryan Valerio and Marc Nugent discuss the *Joy*'s hull condition with FPS representatives Craig Miller and Dan McDavid.

Page 4-5: The tug that serves as the backdrop is based on a photo taken this fall of the *Janice Sue* in dry dock in Northport.

Page 6: Mike Grosvenor photo courtesy of Daniel Stewart. Photo of Tracy Grosvenor guiding his mail boat, the *Shirley*, in the 1930s courtesy of Erhardt Peters Collection, Leelanau Historical Society.

Back Cover: Fishtown photo courtesy of Rick Lahmann; tug photo courtesy of Amanda Holmes.

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