

Lobster held for ransom to raise money for food bank



Pete Chevalier, owner of Gardner's Wharf Seafood, holds up "Wickford Willie," a 20.6-pound, 65-year-old lobster he is holding for ransom to benefit the local food bank. Photo by Adrienne Downing

By Adrienne Downing

Normally being overweight and oversized are not helpful, lifesaving traits. But, in the case of a 20-pound lobster, dubbed "Wickford Willie" after the whale in the movie "Free Willie," those characteristics may save his life and help others in the process.

Willie was caught in the George's Banks area of Canada and brought to Gardner's Seafood in Wickford by Ocean State Lobster, one of the seafood store's suppliers.

"Right after he came, one of my employees left a printout on my desk about a New York eatery letting a big lobster go," Gardner's owner Pete Chevalier said. "I thought, 'I'll let him go, but I will do one better. I'll hold him ransom first to create money for the local food bank.'"

Chevalier's goal is to raise \$2,500 by Saturday, Jan. 31, to save Willie from the lobster pot. "I know in this day and age times are tough, but that is exactly why we need to be doing this. We can do it," he said.

Although the weather last week has held back some of the fund-

raising, Chevalier said that they have received about 25 percent of the funds towards their goal.

Willie is approximately 65 years old and he weighs in at a whopping 20.6 pounds. Chevalier said he is too large to fit in a regular lobster trap and probably made his way to the surface after latching onto a trap. "I go through a lot of lobsters each year, but I may only see one his size," he said.

As with anything rare, Willie is in demand. "I have already had people offer to buy him," Chevalier said. "And, not so they can free him." The owner said that despite the old adage that big lobsters make tough eating, people who know lobsters recognize a good buy when they see one. "If you buy a large prime rib and cook it correctly, it isn't tough. Same with this lobster. If you cook him the right way, he will come out just as tender and tasty as any lobster in the tank," Chevalier said.

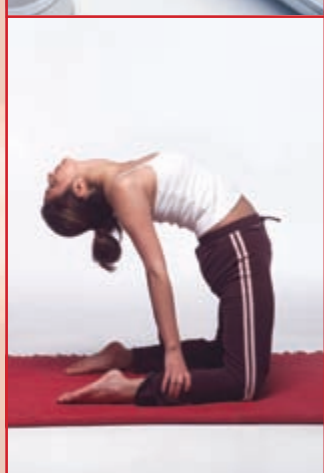
Although Willie is too big for a traditional lobster pot, Chevalier said he does have the means to cook Willie if his ransom demands are not met. "He will fit

in the steamer in the back," the owner said. "Although, I know the community is going to come through and that won't be an option."

When Willie is ransomed, Chevalier plans to release him in the waters off of Hope Island. "Hope Island so he will have hope," Chevalier said.

The owner has thought about tagging him, with the help of the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, but he said that Willie should not have to worry about being caught in local waters because of his size. Lobsters caught in Rhode Island waters must be no more than 7 inches in length from their eye socket to the back of their body. Willie is just over 8 inches. "They only grow about an eighth of an inch each year, so he is about 10 years too old to be caught," Chevalier said.

Those who want to see Willie and help free him from captivity can visit the store and make donations to the "Free Wickford Willie Fund" at Gardner's Wharf, 170 Main St., North Kingstown, during normal business hours.



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Maritime authors to speak at Mystic Seaport

Melville scholar and sailor Dr. Mary K. Bercaw Edwards will kick off the 2009 Maritime Authors Series at Mystic Seaport on Wednesday, Jan. 28.

The series runs once a month on Wednesday evenings from January to April in the museum's G.W. Blunt White Building. Tickets are \$65 for non-members and \$50 for members for the series and \$20 for non-members and \$15 members for individual programs.

The evening begins with a wine and cheese reception at 5:30 p.m., followed by the author's talk at 6 p.m. The program concludes with a question and answer session and a chance for guests to win a free copy of the author's book.

To purchase tickets, or for more information, call 860-572-5339.

Other scheduled presenters are: Feb. 25 – Former Mystic Seaport President J. Revell Carr, who will discuss his narrative history, "Seeds of Discontent," which delves into a century of British exploitation that culminated in decisive confrontation and the birth of a new nation.

March 25 – Long-time champion of the sea and its creatures, Richard Ellis, who will discuss his latest book, "Tuna: A Love Story," which details the biggest, fastest and warmest-bodied fish in the world – which is quickly disappearing.

The Maritime Authors Series is co-sponsored by the Library Fellows of the G.W. Blunt White Building at Mystic Seaport.

Mystic Seaport is the nation's leading maritime museum. Founded in 1929, the Museum is home to four National Historic Landmark vessels, including the Charles W. Morgan, the last wooden whale-ship in the world. The museum is located one mile south of exit 90 off I-95 in Mystic, Conn., and is open Tuesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Winter admission is \$15 for adults and \$9.50 for children ages 6 to 17. Children 5 and under are admitted for free. For more information, call 888-973-2767 or visit www.mysticseaport.org.