

Meet Gary Fandrei, representing Aquaculture Associations



Gary Fandrei is a winter guy. He loves it. Growing up north of Green Bay, Wisconsin, he had an affinity for cold northern climates and outdoor exploration. As a child attending a three-room school, Gary devoured the Book Mobile's supply of Jack London and anything technical. Gary was drawn to the challenges of the Great Lakes and explored the shorelines of Lake Michigan and Lake Superior. In college, he studied ecosystems analysis mostly focused on limnology (the study of lakes). Because Green Bay wasn't cold enough or north enough, Gary

went to Northern Minnesota to earn a Master's Degree in environmental biology. He credits his solid education in the sciences, including both biology and chemistry, for opening doors to good opportunities. His first job out of graduate school was inventorying Lake Superior's seagull population, which required counting thousands of nests along the lake's island shorelines.

Gary's first "real" job was as a pollution control specialist with the State of Minnesota. Gary would hold this job for 13 years, ultimately becoming a research scientist on environmental and water quality issues. Although the job was great, it required living in Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area, which for Gary was just too big. When the opportunity arose to apply for a job in a small town in Alaska in 1990, he seized it. Kenai's Cook Inlet Aquaculture Association (CIAA) was looking for a limnologist for lake fertilization projects and other salmon enhancements. The job—which was advertised in the North American Lake Management Society Journal LakeLine—was brought to Gary's attention by a co-worker who was instrumental in launching the publication. Gary applied for and got the job, deciding to stay for a year with the understanding that the State of Minnesota would hold his job for him if he wanted to come back. That year passed, and Gary has been with CIAA ever since.

This year, CIAA is celebrating its 40th Anniversary. But historically the association has faced numerous challenges exacerbated by changes in the financial world of fisheries, changes which were happening faster than the organization could adapt. When Gary took over as Executive Director in 1996, the salmon enhancement tax was the organization's primary source of funding. This funding source would drop from \$1.8 million to \$190,000, making planning almost impossible. Gary recognized that the organization needed to reinvent itself. He and his staff designed hatchery programs to put the organization on sound financial footing through cost recovery, the harvesting and sale of hatchery salmon. Not an overnight solution--the process takes 5-6 years for the first sockeye salmon to return for harvest—it has taken 10-plus years to put changes into place. While it hasn't been easy, the hatcheries are paying off. Gary is proud of the role he and his staff played in seeing CIAA through to the strong organization it is today.

Gary learned about CIRCAC and its work from his predecessor, Tom Mears. Mears was CIRCAC's first Aquaculture Representative on the Board of Directors and served from 1992 to 1996. In 2006, the Aquaculture Associations elected Gary to represent their interests on the Board and he was recently recognized for his 10 years of service.

Gary said the critical factor for him in serving on the board is that CIRCAC recognizes that humans are part of the landscape. "People are going to have an impact on the environment and we have to identify and minimize that impact. I appreciate the importance of CIRCAC's work on identifying, assessing and minimizing risks," he said.

Gary also sits on the Public Advisory Committee for the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council, serves on the Board of Directors of United Fishermen of Alaska and is chairman of their Enhancement Committee , and is Deputy Commander of the Civil Air Patrol Kenai Squadron.

Gary and his wife Judy have given a home to many at-risk pets, an interest that began when Judy was a local veterinarian technician. Right now, they are caring for a 3-legged dog, three cats, two rabbits, one turtle, one bird, a guinea pig, two horses, and four chickens on their 6-acres in Kenai. Since retiring from her job at the clinic, Judy has started the Peninsula Spay/Neuter Fund a Nonprofit which distributes vouchers to help people defray the costs of spaying and neutering pets.



For relaxation, Gary is a woodworker, something he's been doing his entire life. When a birch tree falls on his land, he makes something out of it. Starting with boards, he cut and shapes wooden spoons. Noticing the birch burl, Gary tried his hand at making bowls, challenging himself to make them entirely by hand without the aid of power tools. Most of his bowls are small, yet still take 30-40 hours each. Gary says they have their own inherent design. "The wood talks to you. Burls have

grains that go all over the place. I don't try to make it something it isn't," he says. "There's no design thought, I just follow the shape and pattern."



Photos courtesy of Gary Fandrei.