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By

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Celebrate Wild Salmon Day in Juneau



"You've got one on, Matthew!" I hear through dawn's early haze.



Popping out of a blanket and wiping sleep from my eyes, I run to the back of the boat and Dad hands me the fishing pole. Line peels off the buzzing reel as a coho bursts away from the boat. I hold on — now fully awake.

“Tip up. Pull back. Now reel in, that’s it!” Dad coaches. After a few tug-heavy runs the fish begins to tire and it’s in the boat. We unwind the impossibly bright shimmering fish from the net and place it on the stringer beside the boat.

“That’s four?” I recount — a new record for a small and very lucky angler. Fishing is tough, eh?

At the age of 5 I was hooked. I learned lessons that hold true today — that we share the catch with the whole crew no matter who reels the fish in; that we take care in cleaning the fillets making sure to get every last morsel; and that we gather around the table to enjoy the flavor with family and friends. Early childhood mornings on the ocean helped me create a deep bond with the water and the life it sustains.

Today, it’s a joy to work on the water with a slightly different purpose. Our business, Barnacle, harvests bull kelp from the waters of Southeast Alaska to craft kelp salsas, pickles and dried seasonings. By sharing Alaska’s edible treasures and telling the unique story behind our ingredients, we hope to inspire others to look around and see the bounty of the land and sea: berries, mushrooms, seaweed, salmon, and more. These foods are plentiful each year, fueled by the energy of the sun and thoughtful stewardship.

As Barnacle’s reliance upon the season’s bounty has increased, our appreciation of the pristine coastal rainforest we call home has deepened.

Salmon are the perfect centerpiece for the celebration of Alaska’s harvest, a direct link between the distant open ocean and the towering evergreen forests. With their return from the sea each summer, salmon carry nutrients to the watersheds where they were born, and occasionally onto our dining tables. Salmon connect us all to the ancient Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian peoples, who have looked into the same iridescent eyes for thousands of years. To ensure that salmon continue to nourish our lives for generations to come, we must steward the systems they depend on.

One of the best ways to appreciate our wild salmon is to eat them.

We are joining more than a dozen Juneau businesses who earn their living thanks to clean water and healthy wild food systems to host the third annual Southeast Feast. The feast will be a celebration of local foods and the seasonal bounty of our coastal communities. It's for a good cause, and you're invited. Proceeds go toward Salmon Beyond Borders' efforts to sustain Southeast Alaska and British Columbia's transboundary rivers — the Taku, Stikine and Unuk — as well as our jobs and way of life.

The event is on Friday, Aug. 10 from 5-7:30 p.m., hosted by Amalga Distillery and Devil's Club Brewing Company. Together with Taku River Reds, we'll be serving craft beer, cocktails, salmon and local oysters paired with Barnacle's kelp salsa and pickles. If you'd like to sip, slurp and celebrate local flavors, while supporting hard-working folks who protect our one-of-a-kind seasonal abundance, come check it out. If you can't make it to the event, do what you can to support sponsors in the name of salmon, including: Uncruise, Sitka Salmon Shares, Wings Airways & the Taku Glacier Lodge, Rising Tide Communications, Bear Creek Outfitters, Grundens, Alaska Trollers Association, Expedition Broker, Alaska Litho, Xtratuf, and Salmon Sisters. Barnacle, The Port and many local businesses — those with "This business supports Alaska wild salmon" signs in the window — will be donating a portion of their sales from Aug. 6-12 to Salmon Beyond Borders.

If we sustain our wild salmon rivers, 5-year-olds will have the chance to get "hooked" on salmon for generations to come.

• **Matt Kern is the owner of Barnacle Foods and resides in Juneau. My Turns and Letters to the Editor represent the view of the author, not the view of the Juneau Empire.**

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