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Billy Joel Fan Base Has Surprisingly Large Segment of Commercial Fishermen

BOSTON, MA [Aug. 6, 2021] - Little-known fact: The Piano Man is a true friend of the fisherman.

The story of Billy Joel at Fenway Park Wednesday night was of a Rock legend holding a capacity crowd (37,731) in the palm of his hand for two-plus hours as he moved raucously, joyfully, through a 23-song set of his undying hits – everything from “Don’t Ask Me Why” and “Movin’ Out” to “Uptown Girl” and, of course, “Piano Man.”

There was, however, a wrinkle to the story of this concert, Joel’s seventh ever at Fenway, and it played out behind the scenes in one of America’s most beloved ballparks.

Behind home plate, clustered in some of the best seats in the house, was a gathering of folks from the seafood industry or with links to the industry. There were some company owners and managers and some people from organizations supporting commercial fishermen. But mainly this group was composed of commercial fishermen from Massachusetts, both working and retired.

They were there because they love Joel’s music, but, even more, to show this Hall of Fame artist how much they appreciate his longtime support for the men and women who harvest the bounty of the sea – the people, in other words, who are the backbone of the region’s multi-billion-dollar-a-year seafood industry.

Diehard Joel fans can easily recall the song he wrote for and about the struggling fishermen of Long Island, New York, where Joel himself was raised and still resides, the “Downeaster Alexa.” In the voice of a fisherman, he sings of a man who had to sell his home because of poor earnings: “Too proud to leave, I work my fingers to the bone, so I could own my Downeaster Alexa.” Knowing there were fishermen in the house, Joel sang that song Wednesday night, adding a nice surprise in the process: while he sang, a picture of the Gloucester Fishermen’s Wives Memorial flashed upon the park’s Jumbotron. The fishing/seafood industry contingent went wild with applause.

As he planned his 2020 summer concert tour, Joel worked out an agreement with the Red Sox whereby he and the team would jointly donate four tickets to every regular season home game that year to the Gloucester Fishermen’s Wives Association and the Long Island Commercial Fishing Association, with the idea that these non-profits would raise much-needed funds by

raffling off the tickets over the course of the season. Because of COVID-19, the plan was postponed for one year. The donated tickets are for premium seats in the EMC/Dell Technologies Club at Fenway, and they come with free parking across the street from the park.

More than half-way through the baseball season, the Gloucester Fishermen's Wives Association and the Long Island Commercial Fishing Association remain deeply engaged in raffling what they call "the Billy Joel tickets."

Said longtime GFWA President Angela Sanfilippo, "These are great tickets. For a family that wins one of our raffles, this can be a once-in-a-lifetime experience. We're doing everything we can to spread the word and to keep selling raffle tickets."

Both Sanfilippo and the executive director of the Long Island Commercial Fishing Association, Bonnie Brady, revere Joel for his generosity and loyalty as much as for his musical, songwriting and vocal skills -- if not more so.

"Billy Joel is a quintessential treasure to us on Long Island," said Brady. "He's always been a friend and an ally to us, and now through this wonderful gift of amazing box seats for raffle, he's fortified the bond between these two hard-working fishing communities."

Added Sanfilippo, "The small, independent fishermen of New England are in a constant struggle to earn a living and make ends meet. We're grateful to have found a champion in one of America's biggest stars. We hope Billy Joel will be able to visit Gloucester someday soon. There's a great seafood dinner waiting for him."

Raffle tickets are now being sold for the bloc of September Red Sox home games. For more information, go to:

<https://redsoxtix.eventgroovefundraising.com/sept-red-sox-game/Campaign/Details>

Working closely for months with the GFWA and the LICFA on ticket raffle fundraising has been Fishing Partnership Support Services, a Massachusetts-based non-profit dedicated to promoting the health, safety and economic security of commercial fishermen. Partnership President J.J. Bartlett, fresh from attending Joel's Fenway concert, had this to say about the effort:

"Billy Joel is incredible! He has brought together the entire Red Sox organization and a big part of the seafood industry in the northeast for the purpose of helping average, hard-working fishermen. We're thrilled by what has been accomplished."