

# *Beverly captain comes aboard for new season of 'Wicked Tuna'*

- By Paul Leighton Staff Writer - /Salem News
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RYAN MCBRIDE/Staff photoBob Cook said filming for season 9 of "Wicked Tuna," during four weeks last July and August, was "crazy competitive," as he and the other featured captains battled to catch the most bluefin tuna.

- Ryan McBride



RYAN MCBRIDE/Staff photoBob Cook stands next to his boat, the F/V Fat Tuna, at Glover Wharf in Beverly. Cook, 47, and his two-man team are joining the cast of "Wicked Tuna" this season.

BEVERLY — Bob Cook has been working on boats ever since his parents dropped him off at the docks in his hometown of Beverly with a local lobsterman when he was 10 years old.

"They said, 'You'll last about 10 minutes,'" he recalled.

Cook, now 47, has lasted a lot longer than that, making his living as a commercial fisherman in the competitive waters off the North Shore. Now his hard work is about to earn him some fame thanks to his role in the new season of "Wicked Tuna."

Cook is one of three new boat captains who will be featured in the popular Gloucester-based reality series that starts its ninth season Sunday at 9 p.m. on the National Geographic Channel. The 15 episodes were filmed during four weeks in July and August as the boats and their crews competed to see who could catch the most bluefin tuna.

In a recent interview on his boat, Fat Tuna, on the Beverly waterfront, Cook said being selected for "Wicked Tuna" is "kind of the pinnacle of this game."

"You're recognized as one of the best and you compete against the best," he said.

"Wicked Tuna" has been on the air since 2012 and is now seen in 171 countries. Dave Marciano, another Beverly resident who has been on the show since it began, said Cook is a great addition to the show.

"Bob is an accomplished tuna fisherman and he brings that along with a great bit of competition," Marciano said. "I think it's going to translate into a whole lot of excitement for the show."

Cook had been trying to earn a spot on the show for seven years. He had two previous interviews, but was turned down both times.

This year, he invited a producer to do the interview on his boat on the Beverly waterfront. When Cook told him that he has sold more than 30 tuna per year over the last five years, the producer said, "Is that a fish tale?"

Cook said he immediately called his buyer and put him on speaker phone, who confirmed that Cook's boat was indeed among the most productive in the area. The producer looked at Cook and said, "Dude, that was awesome."

"They recognized that we could be a pretty good competitor," Cook said. "We're hard chargers."

### **'The conflict is real'**

Cook described the four-week-long filming of the show as "crazy competitive." The boats head out to Stellwagen Bank and Jeffreys Ledge, about 20 nautical miles off the coast, and battle for a limited number of tuna. Cook said he only returns to shore when he catches a tuna or runs out of supplies. At times, they were on the ocean for five or six days at a time, with four people — Cook and his two-man crew, John Kusler and Manny Pereira, and a cameraman — working and sleeping in close quarters.

Cook said two cameras and four GoPros were mounted on his boat to record the action, along with the live camera. The cameraman slept with his camera in case a tuna hit one of the fishing lines.

Cook and the show's other participants were also interviewed for hours in a studio set up in a factory in Gloucester about what had happened on their boats.

Cook said everything that happens in the show — there are 15 episodes — is real. He said the producers like to build on a story line, but don't interject anything that's false.

"The conflict is real," he said. "It always is when you get a bunch of idiots out there who are very competitive. I thought (all the cameras) would change our game a little bit, but we were so focused on the task at hand."

Cook said there is no prize money, but participants are paid a fee for each episode and keep their earnings from their catch. The bluefin tunas range from 250 to 1,000 pounds and can fetch anywhere from \$500 to \$10,000, depending on the market and the quality of the fish, Cook said.

Cook said his appearance on "Wicked Tuna" should provide a "tremendous lift" for his charter fishing business (he is also co-owner of the Little Italy pizza shop in Beverly).

"I couldn't pay a million dollars for that kind of marketing," he said.

Marciano, who also runs a charter service, said he gets customers from around the world due to his appearances on "Wicked Tuna."

"What other TV show can you watch and have a character you're interested in and then call him up and go hang out for a day," Marciano said.

Cook is not allowed to reveal how things turned out, but said, "All I can say is we on Fat Tuna (the name of his boat) were very competitive."

Cook, who recently moved to Essex with his wife, Gwen, said it has not yet been determined who will be on next year's show, but he would love to make a return appearance. Long days on the ocean under normal circumstances can become boring, he said. Taking part in "Wicked Tuna" rekindled the fun part of the job.

"This brought the competitive part of what we do, and the excitement, back into it," he said. "We were fishing against the best guys in the world. If asked, we would not even hesitate to do it again."

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