

Fish on Ice: a UNH Hockey Staple

From swimming in the Atlantic to landing on the ice of Whittemore Center, a fish's journey to one of UNH's biggest traditions.

Emma Kostyun, Staff Writer

Jeff Jordan, the owner and manager of Tri-State Seafoods Inc. in Somersworth, opens the door between his front office into the back warehouse room where an assembly cuts and prepares the day's fish. He is tasked with the job of finding a lucky carp to bring along with him to an upcoming University of New Hampshire (UNH) hockey game, where it will be thrown onto the Whittemore Center ice after the Wildcats score their first goal.

"The throwing of the fish is fun and gets a big rise out of the crowd. It's especially nice when it means us getting the lead or tying the game," said UNH Men's Ice Hockey Coach Mike Souza. The lucky thrower, typically a rink staff member, throws on a hazmat suit and sits on the side of the rink, waiting for the buzzer to sound. Once sounded, they have to huck the fish over the barrier with a good aim to flop onto the ice as close to the goalie box as their throw can get.

A diehard UNH hockey fan who has had season tickets to the team since 1994, Jordan relishes the opportunity to provide for one of the university's most storied traditions. It's something he has done for over three decades, and, even though he is an alum of UNH's notorious rival, the University of Maine, he and his family aim to attend every home game.

The journey of the fish starts on boats along the seacoast, including ports in cities like Boston and Portland. A carp that arrives at the dock is sorted into a freezer and into a truck that drives it's way to the packager. At the packager, carp are cleaned and cut to be sent out to the packager's respective customers. Instead, this particular carp is placed into a small styrofoam container, UNH written on it in Sharpie.



Tri-State Seafoods in Somersworth.

Emma Kostyun



Carp ready to be launched onto the Whit ice. (Emma Kostyun)

The carp inside of this small styrofoam container is then picked up by a staff member of UNH Athletics, stuffed into the trunk of their car and stored in the Maintenance Office of the Whittemore Center until the beginning of the hockey game. Still in its container, the carp sits on the sidelines near the feet of the lucky hazmat suit-wearer. When the sound of the buzzer indicates UNH's first goal, the lid to the box opens and that carp is thrown out

onto the ice following the cheers of the crowd.

Brothers of Zeta Chi, a fraternity no longer on campus, came to Jordan in 1992 asking for the biggest, ugliest, smelliest fish to throw on the ice. Back then there were no hazmat suits, as the brothers of Zeta Chi would grasp the slimy sea creature without a care in the world. Jordan initially supplied them with fish sometimes as heavy as 20 pounds, but as the height of the rink walls grew due to safety concerns, he downsized to the five or six-pound range.

This was how the fish traveled from Jordan's Somersworth shop to the Whittemore Center Arena ice up until seven years ago. When the fraternity was disbanded in 2016, UNH Athletics began working directly with Tri-State Seafoods. The university began to look for sponsors to finance the toss. As of now, the throwing of the fish will continue for years to come as a beloved tradition of UNH hockey.

"I'm sure other schools and programs have their own traditions...I just think ours is the best," says Souza. "The happiness that spreads on the faces of the UNH student crowd, the family crowd, the players and coaching staff and even the ones that come on the opposing team's faces is what makes this tradition stick."

UNH is always looking for volunteers to rise up to the task of enduring the smell and sliminess of the fish for the sake of the crowd. Many have been able to do this, from fraternity members to rink staff to volunteers. Anyone who is up for the task can cement their place in UNH hockey lore.