Commercial Fisheries News

Friendship Trap sold; new owner plans to follow company recipe

Maine line with Brian Robbins

There's some big news at Friendship Trap Co. in Friendship, ME, but that doesn't necessarily mean big changes as far as customers are concerned.

There's a whole generation of lobstermen in New England who weren't even born when Pike Bartlett founded Friendship Trap Co. (FTC) in 1977. And many of them may have never met Bartlett, who, while maintaining primary ownership of FTC, has been devoting his attention to other business interests for some time now.

So the news that Bartlett has sold FTC to 49-year-old Chris Anderson most likely will be met with the question, "Yeah, but where's Mike? And what about Jerry? And Mark?"

"Mike" would be Mike Wadsworth, who has been part of Friendship Trap for about two-thirds of its 34-year history and at the company's helm for the last dozen years.



Brian Robbins photo

From left, Mike Wadsworth and Chris Anderson, who is the new owner of Friendship Trap Co.

Mike and his brother Jerry, who handles FTC's road sales from Stonington, ME to Rhode Island, have been the familiar faces in the Friendship booth at trade shows and in ports along the New England coast for years. And their brother Mark, a 30-plus year veteran in the trap building business, is in charge of production at the Friendship facility, which explains why "Wadsworth" may be a more familiar name to some than "Bartlett."

New owner Anderson wants to assure FTC's customers that he knows what's made the company successful over the years. In a recent conversation with him and Mike Wadsworth at the Friendship facility, Anderson said he's "not about to come in and try to tell them to change the recipe. I'd be the world's biggest fool to do that."

Anderson, whose resume includes successful upper-level positions with IBM, Dell, Best Buy, and Avery Dennison, says he had reached the point where he was "tired of the corporate world."

"It just isn't me," he said. "I wanted to get into a more down-to-earth approach to things … and spend my time with hard-working, straightforward people. That's who I want to be around."

Although Anderson, his wife, and three children had vacationed in Maine, they'd never been to Friendship.

"I wasn't familiar with Friendship Trap, but when I found out it was for sale earlier this year and looked into it, I was impressed," he said. "It really was just what I was looking for – a market leader that could benefit from my experience in custom manufacturing, run by people of integrity who create a fantastic product. My goal is to build on top of the great foundation they've already laid down."

Or, as Mike Wadsworth put it, "Chris likes what we've been doing. He just wants to do more of it."

Anderson grinned. "In the meantime, we want everybody to know that Mike's still here, working with our customers and suppliers. It's still Mark and his crew building traps for our lobstermen. And Jerry's still going to be the guy out in the field working with them.

"Plus," he continued, "we have Jimmy Emerson and his crew at our Downeast branch in Columbia Falls. They know their customer base really well and have been building traps for that area for years. All in all, we have an experienced crew that knows how to do things right. I wasn't looking for a sick business that needed to be fixed. I wanted a good business that I could help to make even better."

After the first few weeks of the new regime, all hands were pleased.

"Chris understands and knows what he has here," said Mike. "We have a lot of loyal, long-time customers who appreciate the way we've done business with them over the years. And that's not going to change."

He smiled and nodded toward Anderson. "You know, we're thinking he'd make a good 'honorary Wadsworth.'"

Anderson laughed. "Now that would be an honor." ■