

# Guam: Fishing Crosses Party Lines



Chris Dueñas



Therese Terlaje



Amanda Shelton



Tina Muña-Barnes



Sabina Perez



The Guam fishing community's hopes are high with the recent election.

COVID-19, high gas prices, an itchy inflation, shipping delays and shortage of essential products have hurt local families. And as the saying goes, "When there is a crisis, folks go fishing!" Folks turned to fishing to provide sustenance and protein to their families and some much needed dollars in their pocketbooks just to make ends meet. The election of some key senators who have demonstrated support for Guam's fishermen brings hope for legislation to protect our fragile natural resources so fishing for sustenance is maintained.

Chris Dueñas (R), a long-time fisherman, boat owner and supporter of the Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association, is in for another term and may again serve as Minority Leader. Reelected Speaker Therese Terlaje (D) has been a strong supporter of Guam's fishermen and the Co-op. She regularly joins fisheries meetings in the community and at the Co-op. Amanda Shelton (D), also back in, has a family home right on the water, and her late father Sonny, was a long-time fisherman and Co-op supporter, in addition to fabricating lures and importing boats for sale. Vice Speaker Tina Muña-Barnes (D) has been a friend

to fishermen for years and an advocate for making Guam a transshipment hub for tuna once again. Sabina Perez (D), reelected, is also a strong supporter of fishermen, joining the Council's Advisory Panel meetings when items on the agenda need her input.

Governor Lou Leon Guerrero and Lt. Governor Josh Tenorio have also demonstrated their generous support of all fishermen with contributions of thousands of dollars towards the building of a new Co-op facility.

*Biba Peskadot!* 🐟

## Guam May Soon See Consistent Supply of Fresh Locally Caught Fish

In the 1980s through the late 1990s, Guam saw a fish transshipment value of more than \$94 million. Very little of the fish made it into Guam's economy. In fact, Guam's Bureau of Statistics and Plans reported in 2018 that Guam imported 99% of its seafood, valued at more than \$29 million.

Fast forward to 2022. Fumi Kajiyama, an entrepreneur whose roots hail from the old Mangilao Retail Store and whose father, Takayuki Kajiyama, was a Guam fishing pioneer, is looking to provide a consistent supply of fresh local seafood. Back in the day, his father owned a boat with enough deck space to start a trolling and deep bottomfish fishery, mostly for local markets. He had a working knowledge of Japanese fishing methods and he was generous in sharing his knowledge. Unfortunately, since his passing, no one stepped up to take over the activity. But now his oldest son is looking at filling the void.

Fumi was raised and educated in Guam. With his younger brother and sister, he ran the Mangilao Retail Store after their

parents passed away. He graduated from the University of Guam (UOG), but his passion remains in fishing.

From a young age, Fumi joined his father on the boat plying for anything that took their lures and bait. And they were quite successful at it, too. Old man Kajiyama became a household name amongst Guam's seasoned fishermen. Young Fumi enjoyed his adventures fishing from a boat. In fact, in a 1982 fishing derby, Fumi won the yellowfin tuna category with a huge 134.5-pound fish—a Guam derby record that he held for many years.

Council staff caught up with Fumi recently to ask about his vision to bring fresh fish to the local Guam market.

**I've known you to be a fisherman ever since we were young. How did you get started fishing?**

I love the ocean and enjoy the thrill of catching the big one.

**You fished the cliffs behind UOG and along Glass Breakwater at night. Each time you and your friends carried such heavy loads of gear, including heavy car batteries. So obviously you are very passionate about fishing. What fuels your passion for fishing?**

I guess accompanying my father on his boat fishing all day, all night and sometimes over several days, left an impression on



CONTINUED ON PAGE 12



Fumi Kajiyama fishing tuna with his family in 1982. Photo: Fumi Kajiyama.

me about fishing and I have grown to love it. But his view of fishing was more for monetary reasons and thus things started to become more commercialized with computerized reels and heavy gear. I was more in it for the fun at that time, and to be able to catch the big ones that got away. So, with trial and error, I honed my skills at trying to catch the big one. You know the car battery that we used to bring to the cliff fishing was not really used for seeing in the dark, although it could be used for that when we were lifting the fish. We used them with powerful spotlights to flash the water in front of the *mamulan* (giant trevally) to scare it and prevent it from going to rocks or coral formations that could cut us off. Plus, I love eating fish too.

### **Recently you expressed interest in starting an open ocean fishery business. Where did you get the idea to start something like this?**

I currently work as the acting manager for SPE, Inc., at their Agaña Shopping Center Tokyo Mart Express outlet. At our stores, we use a lot of fish, but they are all imported frozen products. It's not really bad, but if you've ever tried fresh tuna, compared to the frozen product

that is chemically treated, there is a big difference. Those products may look good and last longer because it's been treated, but it just doesn't have the taste. The sad thing here is that we are in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, and we know tons of tunas were transported through Guam by air, but locally we are only using seafood that comes from Malaysia or South America and such. We do have some local fish available, but the supply is not sufficient and consistent enough to support the needs of all the stores, hotels and specialty markets. So, the market potential is certainly there, but no one seems to be filling this gap, and I thought this might be something to look into as a viable future business venture.

### **What preparations have you done to get your project going?**

I purchased a 35-foot boat and together with my team, will be upgrading the boat for fishing and getting ready to berth it in Agat very soon. I also purchased all kinds of fishing equipment like what the Japanese fishermen use, including new electronic fishing technology such as sounders, GPS and a radar system, in addition to fishing

gear for pelagic fish and squid. Basically, trying to do things right by carefully studying the procedures and techniques used by successful seasoned fishermen.

### **How will you and your team prepare or train to use this new technology?**

My plan is to establish dialogue with fishermen from Okinawa that know open ocean fishing and learn their ways of fishing that can be applied in our waters. I have my own basic fishing knowledge, but I want to expand that with guys that have been out there with experience, to not have to reinvent the wheel.

### **What is the timeline for your venture? When will you and your team be ready to start fishing?**

I am targeting to be ready towards the end of 2023. I want to have all the elements in place, including safety gear, and access to bait for each of the species we will be targeting. At first, we plan to do exploratory fishing in the waters around Guam and the CNMI. Find out the good spots, follow the moon, the tide, and weather permitting, the annual seasonality of bait fish that come around our islands. We will work with the local community and the markets to accept our fish. And we will work closely with the tourism industry to develop a supply chain of fresh locally caught fish to the restaurants and hotels. We will do all that first before our first commercial venture next year.

### **Anything else you'd like to share?**

My basic aim is *not* to compete with local fishermen, but rather fish areas that are a little beyond the range of local weekend fishermen so we don't affect them. I don't want people to think that when we start our fishing operation, the local fishing grounds will become empty because of us and others like us.

I also want to thank the Council, the local government agencies, my employer SPE, Inc., the local fishermen and the community for their support in helping us get started. 🐟