

Gulf of America Reef Fish Shareholders' Alliance

GULF COMMERCIAL FISHERMAN PROGRAM

GULF STATES MARINE FISHERIES
COMMISSION ANNUAL MEETING

Ashford Rosenberg

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and Special Projects





About the Shareholders' Alliance

The Shareholders' Alliance is the largest organization of commercial grouper, snapper and reef fish fishermen in the Gulf of America. We work hard to ensure that our fisheries are sustainably managed so our fishing businesses can thrive, and our fishing communities can exist for future generations. We are the harvesters that provide the American public with a reliable source of domestically-caught wild Gulf seafood, and we do this through a philosophy that sustainable seafood and profitable fishing businesses depend on healthy fish populations

The Problem – the “Graying of the Fleet”

01

Aging Industry

The average age of commercial fishermen is increasing.

In the Gulf - average age is 50 years+.

02

No Deckhands

Current fishermen report shortage/lack of young, qualified deckhands.

03

Where to start?

For those that may be interested in being a commercial fisherman, there is no clear roadmap or “first step.”

04

Start up costs

For those that want to make the leap to vessel owner, start up costs are high.

Permits - \$\$

Vessels - \$\$\$

Shares/Allocation - \$\$

The Solution – Gulf Commercial Fisherman Program



GCFP DEVELOPMENT

January 2018 - "Coordinating Team" Established

Eric Brazer, Ashford Rosenberg,
Bob Gill



March 2018 - Research Phase

Coordinating team began researching
other young fishermen training
programs across the country

August 2018 - Convened a Planning Team

Coordinating Teams identified 8 highly
respected "young" individuals who would
bring knowledge and expertise to
development.



December 2018 - Steering Committee Established

Acts as an "think tank." 25 respected leaders in
fisheries across the Gulf (fishermen, processors,
wholesalers, NGOs, etc).

Fall 2019

Hosted webinars between SC
and coordinators of other
fishermen training programs



GCFP DEVELOPMENT



Fall 2019 - Development Grant from NFWF

Convened SC in-person to determine structure and work plan for Gulf-specific training.



March 2020 - In-Person SC Meeting

20 members of the SC met in Tampa, FL to identify main priorities for training program.

2020-2021 - Curriculum Development

The PT met monthly via webinar to take direction from the SC and create a blueprint curriculum and communications plan for the program.



2021 - Curriculum approval by SC

The PT met monthly via webinar to take direction from the SC and create a blueprint curriculum and communications plan for the program.



2021-2024

Submitted multiple grants to fund a pilot training program.

The GCFP Curriculum



Shore Based + Field Training

We developed a two-week shore-based curriculum which would be followed by a “training fishing trip” in the fishery of the students’ choice.



Large Focus on Safety

The Gulf commercial fishing industry is inherently dangerous, so students would get in-depth safety training.



Mentorship

We would pair students with an industry mentor to provide guidance past the GCFP training.



Financial Literacy

Because fishing is not a typical 9-5 job with consistent pay, students receive financial training to plan around the highs and lows of fishing-based income.



Inclusive

It was important to the SC that someone’s financial or learning status NOT be a barrier to participation in the GCFP. All budgets included funds for transportation, housing, and learning accommodations if necessary.



Training the future of commercial fisheries

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

October 2024

GCFP Pilot - Galveston, TX

- Proof of concept for training program
- Reef fish only
- Target 5 participants
- Shorter curriculum

The Results:

- 5 participants (2 local, 1 Dallas, 1 Anahuac, 1 North Carolina).
- Positive feedback from participants and industry members.
- No one got sea sick!



May 2025

GCFP Pilot – Madeira Beach, FL

- Build on lessons learned from Galveston
- Modified agenda to focus on BLL
- Reef fish only
- Target 10 participants
- More diverse species

The Results:

- 5 participants (3 FL, 1 CA, 1 TX).
- Positive feedback from participants and industry members.
- No one got sea sick!





Training the future of commercial fisheries

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

From Teaching School to Chasing Schools

George Beyer



From Teaching School to Chasing Schools

George Beyer

“GCFP gave me the confidence to move forward in my new career.”



Following the new Pipeline

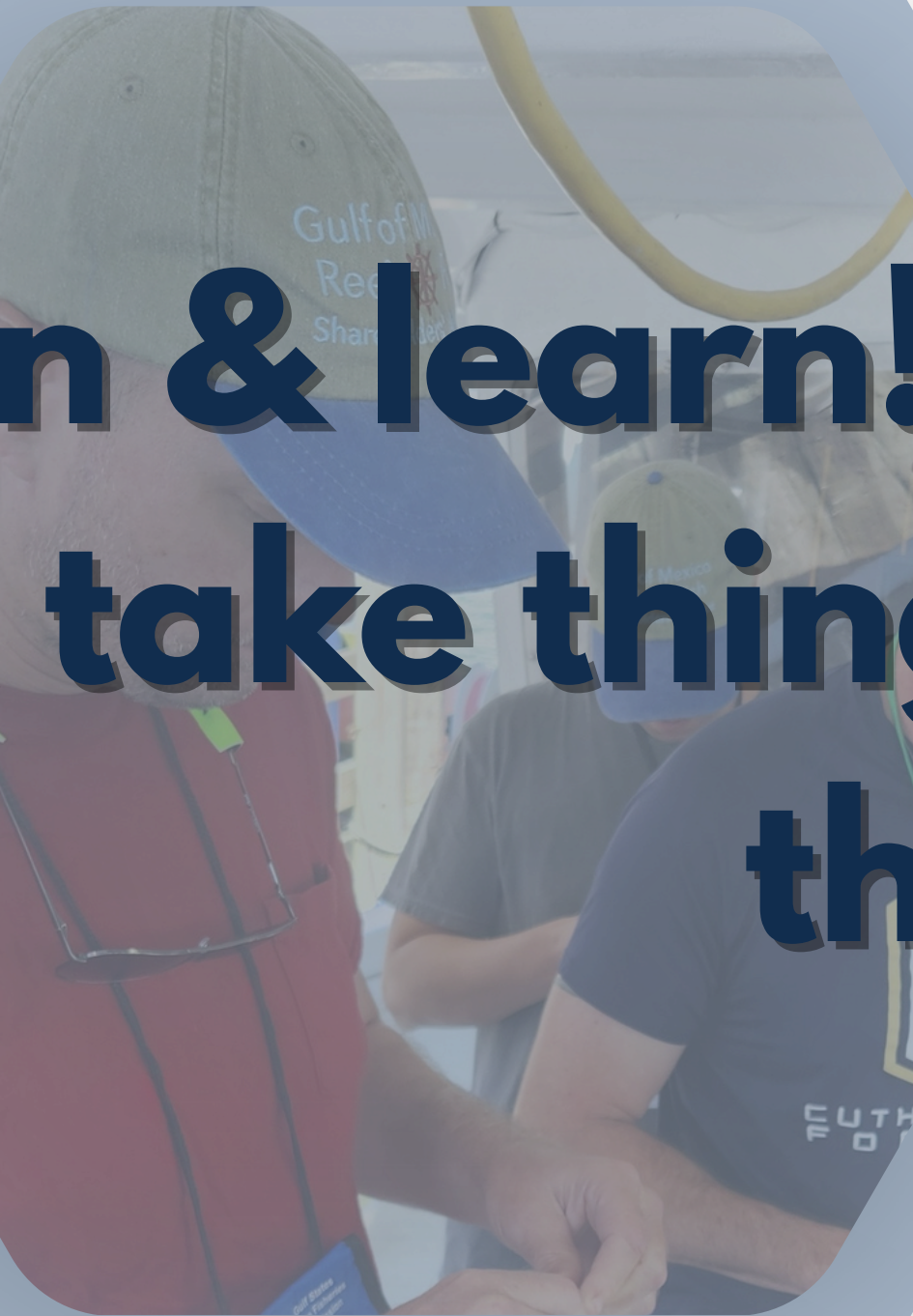
Heath Darnell



Following the new Pipeline

Heath Darnell

**“Listen & learn! Be open to feedback.
Don't take things personally once on
the boat!”**



Chasing dreams from the City of Dreams

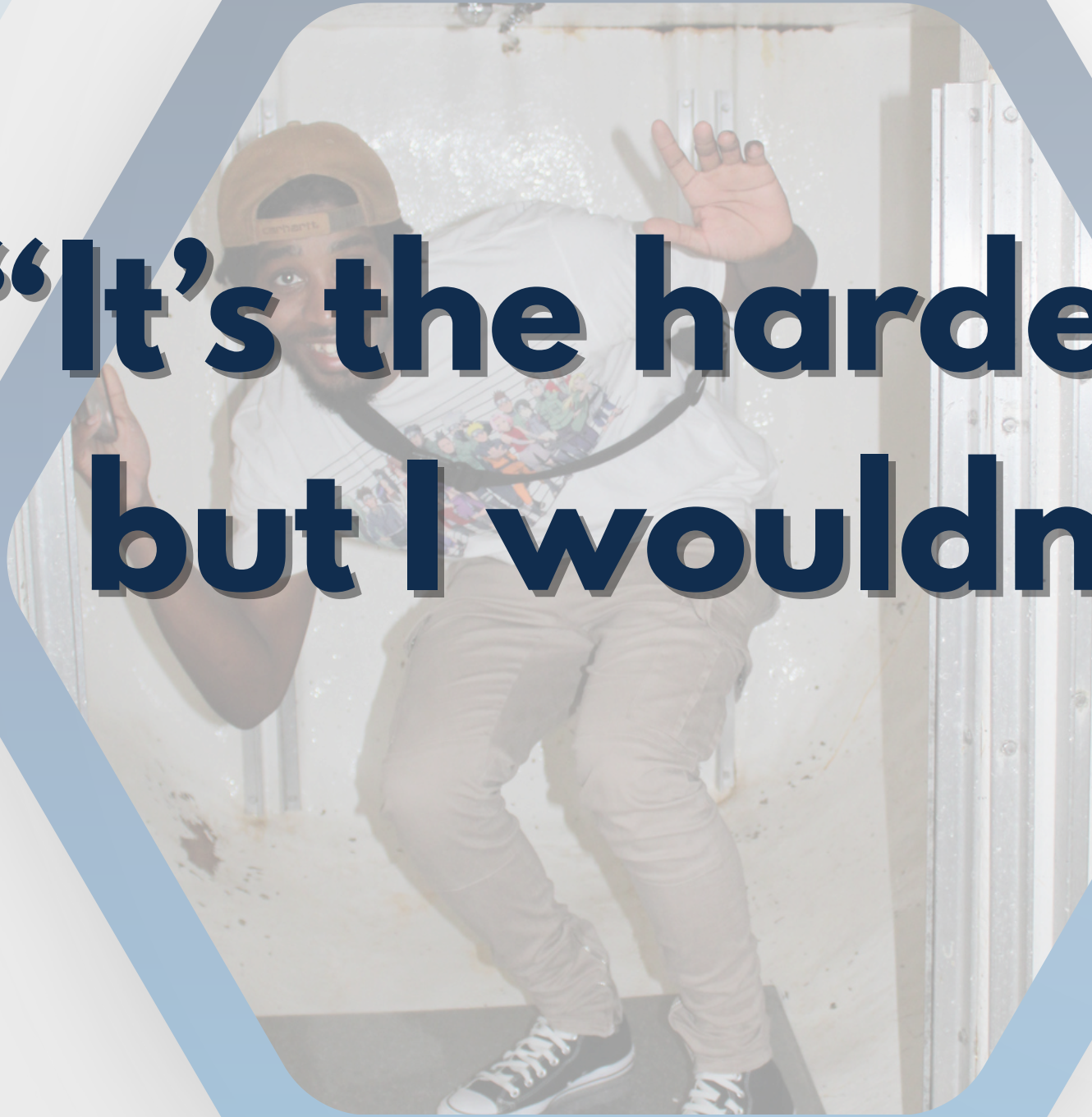
Eric Brinkley



Chasing dreams from the City of Dreams

Eric Brinkley

**“It’s the hardest I’ve ever worked,
but I wouldn’t change a thing.”**



Building on Foundations

Wesley Keith



Building on Foundations

Wesley Keith

“My best advice is to make as many contacts within the GCFP as you can.”



Thank you to the GCFP Team



Bob Gill



Matt Kammann
Texas Sea Grant



Laura Picariello
Texas Sea Grant



Joy Hazell
Florida Sea Grant



Training the future of commercial fisheries

WHAT'S NEXT?

The logo is a teal hexagon containing a white circular emblem. The emblem features a stylized fish silhouette composed of three overlapping leaf-like shapes. The text "NATIONAL FUTURE" is arched across the top, and "FISHERMEN COALITION" is arched across the bottom, both in white serif font.

NATIONAL FUTURE FISHERMEN COALITION



What We Believe In

- Empowering young fishermen through programs that foster growth.
- Strengthening industry networks from the local to the national level.
- Combating false narratives and promoting sustainability.
- Celebrating the legacy of fishing and its critical role in coastal communities.
- Championing domestic seafood and its benefits for both economy and health.

Thank You



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