

THE MAGAZINE FOR LEADING BUSINESS EXECUTIVES

US **Business** Executive

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Bar Harbor Lobster Company Inc.

Fresh New England Seafood Heads South

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Bar Harbor Lobster Company Inc. (BHLC) is an unusual regional seafood distributor based in Orlando, Fla. Jeffrey Hazell, founder and president of BHLC, grew up in coastal Massachusetts. “My father was a commercial lobsterman in

Marblehead,” explains Hazell, who never planned on getting into the seafood business. “I hated it,” he laughs. The lobstering business is often a family tradition in New England, but instead of going to work on the boat with his dad Hazell took





a position as a busboy in a local yacht club at the age of 15.

After high school Hazell attended the University of New Haven in Connecticut, where he majored in hotel and restaurant management, and eventually took an internship at Disney World. “I fell in love with Florida,” says Hazell. “After I graduated from the university I went back to Orlando to work for a major restaurant chain.” A few years later Hazell returned home to celebrate his birthday. “I remember I was turning 25, and I went out on the boat with my dad,” he recalls. That is when the concept for BHLC hit him.

Make Way for Crustaceans

Hazell then began researching the lobster market and fisheries at the Boston Public Library, and in October 1985 he sold his first lobster and started BHLC in his garage. “I realized I needed lobster tanks,” he says. “So I built my first commercial tank out of plywood and fiberglass.” After about six months, the business started taking off and he realized he needed to move BHLC out of his garage.

“Up until January 1987 I was working with about 1,200 square feet of space,” recalls Hazell. As the business grew, however, Hazell started renting out more bays, and eventually he had seven.

BHLC has grown significantly since the earlier days. Hazell is now operating out of a 21,000-square foot facility and presently has over 750 stock keeping units. “We are just about doubling the size of our building,” he says. The additional 18,000 square feet will make room for 2,000 pallet-position freezers and a state-of-the-art lobster holding tank systems, keeping the tasty crustaceans alive and in good shape until their sale to retailers and restaurants in the area.

Hazell has started a chain of restaurants to complement his seafood wholesale business. Hazell’s Boston Lobster Feast, a Maine lobster and seafood buffet, was also a hit. “A restaurant here in Orlando went out of business and I went to check it out,” he says of Boston Lobster Feast’s beginnings. For 22 years Hazell operated five locations, but now due to the recession he has two locations in the heart Orlando and Kissimmee, which are advertised by the world’s only Volkswagen with a giant lobster riding topside. Between Boston Lobster Feast and BHLC, Hazell employs around 230 people. The wholesale



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STONINGTON, MAINE

“We are on the docks every day to make sure our customers – such as Bar Harbor Lobster Company - receive only the best quality lobsters”

HUGH REYNOLDS, OWNER

Greenhead Lobster (www.greenheadlobster.com) works with a dedicated fleet of independent local Stonington Maine lobstermen in the rugged waters of the Gulf of Maine’s Penobscot Bay - a prime habitat for high quality lobsters - and maintains large inventories of high quality stock, with year-round and worldwide distribution capabilities.



GREENHEAD LOBSTER
STONINGTON, MAINE



38 Ocean Street
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division currently has 28 delivery vehicles to provide fresh seafood to restaurants all over Florida.

Contract Claws

BHLC and Boston Lobster Feast have maintained growth throughout the recession, despite troubles faced by many businesses. Fish markets are often out of sync with economic trends as they rely heavily on product populations and demand. Hazell primarily credits his companies' diversity for the team's ability to float through the recent financial dip many businesses are experiencing. And, according to Hazell, the lobster market has a lot to do with it, too.



Jeffrey Hazell, founder and president of BHLC

"When the recession hit, lobster prices decreased dramatically," explains Hazell. "We actually made money on inexpensive lobster." For the lobster industry, the market favors the buyer. Lobstermen like Hazell's father and grandfather experienced record low sale prices for product, in some areas less than \$2 per pound. Meanwhile, lobster populations and catch numbers have reached record highs.

BHLC has expanded its offerings to include all species of fresh fish from the North Pacific to the South Pacific, offering around 20 species daily. The company also operates three retail locations in addition to an Orland-based wholesale store that is open to members of the public looking for fresh fish, live lobsters and frozen seafood items. The business is fully certified by the Safe Quality Food (SQF) Certification Program, reinforcing Hazell's commitment to fresh, safe, tasty seafood.

The company runs primarily on sales to local restaurants, but Hazell has also focused on supporting his alma mater. He serves on UNH's board of governors and offers financial and material support to the program.

In addition, Hazell has partnered with UNH's hospitality program. The company even provides seafood to two restaurants, HazelNut Café and Jeffery's Fusion Restaurant, which are funded by Hazell and run by students in the program to serve as a hands-on learning experience in the industry. Hazell's merits don't go unnoticed. He was awarded an honorary doctorate in business administration by the university in January 2010.

BHLC is dedicated to providing its customers with the state's largest variety of fresh, frozen and live responsibly procured seafood, while simultaneously giving back to the organizations that have helped the company along the way. Hazell and

the team offer specialty items and custom orders, creating a well-rounded supply of seafood in the Florida market. Bar Harbor Lobster Company has become a one-stop shop for restaurants and retailers through diversity and a dedication to safe, quality foods. •

An advertisement for Omega Sea Inc. The top section features a logo of a stylized blue shell and the text "OMEGA SEA INC. IMPORTER :: PROCESSOR :: DISTRIBUTOR". Below this is a quote in green script: "Congratulations Bar Harbour Lobster Co., Inc.! Best of luck on all your future projects!". The middle section contains two paragraphs of text. The first paragraph states: "Omega Sea Inc. was established in 1985 as the USA representative for a major Icelandic seafood exporting company. Since we have grown over the years, we continue to specialize in only two products: Scallops & Cold-Water Shrimp (Pandalus Borealis)." The second paragraph states: "Omega Sea now imports these products from sources around the world. Our products are also packed domestically in private labels as well as our own brands." To the right of the text are two images: a scallop and a pile of cold-water shrimp. The bottom section of the ad has a blue background with the text "Get your Omega-3 through Omega Sea!!!!" and the website "www.omegasea.com".

