

New Bedford hooks lucrative marine trade show

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NEW BEDFORD — A major marine trade show will be coming to the city in June, bringing thousands of visitors and potentially generating more than \$1 million in economic activity, according to city and event officials.

The Commercial Marine Expo, formerly named the Fish Expo Atlantic, will be held June 9-10 at State Pier, a change in venue from years past when the event was held in Providence.

"It provides a much more economical venue for people to exhibit and attend the show," said Ted Hugger, the show director. "But more importantly, it also gives us a waterfront location."

Hugger, who bought the trade show in 2007, has broadened the event's scope from commercial fishing to all marine-related commercial activities, from tugs to fireboats to related service industries.

The new location will give exhibiting companies direct access to the water, allowing them to tie up boats and to conduct demonstrations outside, Hugger said.

About 80 percent of the exhibition spaces already have been sold, according to Hugger, who said there should be about 175 companies at the show.

The 2008 show attracted people from 30 states and 15 countries, and 3,000 to 4,000 people are expected to attend this year's event, Hugger said.

"The economic impact of a show like this is really huge," said Hugger, citing a study that said attendees of this type of event typically spend about \$297 a day on travel, lodging and other costs.

If those numbers hold true, the expo could generate more than \$1 million in economic activity over those two days in June, Hugger said.

Kristin Decas, executive director of the city's Harbor Development Commission, said the expo will complement the city's working waterfront and help put the city on the map as a major marine hub.

"It gives us the opportunity to sustain our posture as the number one value fishing port as well as diversify and look at new options on the horizon," she said. "It's a high-profile event; it's a great draw."

The event also will bring new life to underutilized space at State Pier, Decas said.

"It's a facility that certainly has room for growth," she said.

Mayor Scott W. Lang said the event will provide an economic-stimulus boost to the city at the beginning of the summer season.

"Those are the type of patrons and this is the type of event that we want to host," Lang said. "We think it's a natural fit, and we're going to continue to seek more and more of these opportunities."

The marine expo will expand the track record the city has developed with its successful hosting of different festivals and the Bioneers by the Bay conference, according to Lang.

"You start building this reputation to do exhibitions, or expos, conventions," Lang said. "I think you build another sector of your economy."

Matthew Morrissey, executive director of the New Bedford Economic Development Council, said the marine expo will help the city highlight its harbor in a new and different way.

"It's an opportunity to leverage an important asset of the city's — the State Pier building — to showcase the harbor to a whole new universe of people," he said.

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