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Wilcox Fisheries

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The 'shining big sea waters' of Gitchee Gumee (Lake Superior) provide near pristine habitat for lake whitefish and other prized species such as lake trout and lake herring. You can find prime specimens of those fish, caught by Ralph Wilcox's family.

As patrons savor the delicate flavor of whitefish and munch on fries and coleslaw, they can see evidence of the family's fishing history in the photo collage that decorates the wall, and possibly hear Ralph and his wife

Shirley discuss the day's catch.

Behind the restaurant is the boat that their son Dan built to bring the catch to the dock from the vessel that has to be moored on an outlying island because of Lake Superior's unusually low water levels, the lowest Ralph can remember on the world's largest (by surface area) freshwater lake. [Ralph has also been dealing with another challenge to his fishing way of life—sea lamprey, the scourge of the lake trout. It seems they're more abundant than ever, despite decades of treating the larval lamprey in streams that flow into Lake Superior.]



Ralph and Shirley Wilcox

For some folks, these challenges would be enough to send them to another line of work, especially considering the low prices they had been getting for their product from wholesalers. In fact, many young people find it easier to work in the casino than gamble with the hard work and uncertain conditions and low return on investment that fishing families face.

But Ralph is undaunted. "We think of new things to do," he says, "like this restaurant. It's fun; an adventure every day." And Shirley nods knowingly. It's truly a family affair, as Dan plays an essential role in the fishing operation, while she and their daughter manage the restaurant kitchen, as well as sell smoked fish and condiments to folks who want to take home a Superior taste.

It's been a family affair for generations; Ralph's is the fourth to work the nets and haul in the catch. He first became involved when he was three years old, and had his own small boat by the time he was 9 or 10. He's worked with cotton nets, linen, nylon, monofilament and now Nyltex. He hopes that Dan will carry it on. Meanwhile, Ralph persists and is glad to be healthy enough to continue harvesting the bounty from Superior's waters and seeing people in the restaurant enjoy the product of his family's labors.



Ralph Wilcox In Smoker

The Story

Early Whitefish

Fishing Families

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Fun Fish Fact

The scientific name for lake whitefish is *Coregonus clupeaformis*.

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