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### **Blessing of the Fleet: A Biloxi tradition**

The Biloxi Blessing of the Fleet is a historic tradition that marks the opening of shrimp season every year. The beginning of this event dates back to August 11, 1929, when hundreds of fishermen gathered together to pray for a successful season and to have their vessels blessed. Two services were held that day — one in North Biloxi (now D’Iberville) and one at Biloxi’s Point Cadet — and were presided by representatives from St. Michael, St. John and Sacred Heart Catholic churches.

The following day, the Daily Herald described the memorable services as “special ceremonies asking the blessings of Divine Providence on the fishing fleet of Biloxi which will start out in its search of the Gulf Waters for shrimp.” Vessels anchored throughout the coastal waters and Back Bay were decorated “with flags of all nations and paper streamers,” a lively tradition that has continued ever since.

Currently, there is only one ceremony, which begins with an evergreen wreath being dropped into the Mississippi Sound to commemorate fishermen who have been lost at sea. One by one, shrimping vessels parade through the Biloxi Channel in front of an anchored “Blessing Boat” as the officiating priest prays for a safe and bountiful season.

The weekend celebration kicks off with a fais do-do, a festival held on the Biloxi Town Green that features live entertainment, craft and food vendors, and local artisans. Also included in the festivities is the coronation of a Shrimp King and Queen, who also join the priest on the Blessing Boat.

The title of Shrimp King belongs to someone who has a strong background in the seafood industry. This year’s reigning royalty is Richard Gollott, vice president of Golden Gulf Coast Packing Co. and president of Gollott’s Ice & Oil. His family’s experience in the seafood industry can be traced back to his great-grandfather, and Gollott considers it a great honor to participate in the Blessing of the Fleet tradition that his family has celebrated for generations.

“I think getting God’s blessing on anything is the most important thing in the world and this tradition showcases our heritage,” Gollott said. “It’s Biloxi’s history. The seafood industry built Biloxi, and without this industry, who knows what this town would be.”

The Blessing of the Fleet now is primarily sponsored by St. Michael, which is commonly referred to as the “Fishermen’s Church” due to being tightly interwoven in the practicing faith, and serving as a place of worship for fishing families since its founding as a mission in 1907.

**This story is part of the Gulf Coast Seafood Fall Shrimp Celebration, a campaign by the Mississippi Hospitality & Restaurant Association and its partners Gulf Seafood Trace and the Gulf Seafood Marketing Coalition to promote area restaurants serving traceable Gulf shrimp. Visit [gulfshrimptales.com](http://gulfshrimptales.com) to learn more about Gulf shrimp and the celebration.**