

Cat Herding, Alaska Style

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Photo courtesy of Alaska Div of Homeland Security & EM

What is the best part of your emergency management team?

I think the changing composition of our teams at the state and local level is fascinating. Across the spectrum we have a healthy combination of long term, career employees and new, energetic, and highly educated men and women entering our career field. The workforce has been transformed over the last decade, and that new energy and academic background has transformed emergency management in Alaska into a professional career field, as opposed to a place for retiring emergency services or military personnel to end up.

What's a topic you think emergency management should focus more on, as a collective?

I think emergency managers have demonstrated their role as lead “cat-herder” throughout our Nation’s response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Just like we have asked FEMA and Congress to recognize FEMA as the Nation’s lead federal agency for coordinating the response to all national emergencies, emergency managers at the state and local level should continue focusing on building our partnerships with non-traditional disaster agencies, such as Public Health, State Energy Offices, and Cybersecurity agencies. Who better to organize the chaos of another pandemic, or manage the consequences of a grid failure or widespread cyberattack?

You have always been very active in the association, not only as the Director you are now, but also in the NEMA Deputy Director Group when you held that role. Dare we say you ‘pirate’ our attention well before Savannah. How would you best describe NEMA, especially to someone who is not as familiar with the association?

Argh Matey! NEMA is the number one organization for State Emergency Management Directors and their teams to network, lean on each other, and have “frank and meaningful” dialog with our partners at FEMA. Our leadership forums provide an unparalleled opportunity to meet face-to-face (finally!), and research the latest and greatest innovation and technology with our incredible sponsors (thank you!!!). I think if you asked my friend Bill Turner (what a great pirate name!), he would tell you that attending a NEMA forum within days of being appointed as Connecticut’s Emergency



Management Director was a great introduction to his peers. Finally, I’d say our business is serious, we’ve all been overwhelmed in recent years, but NEMA brings an atmosphere of collegiality and just plain fun to our profession!

The ‘cook off’ during the Virtual Summit 2020 was a best hit to match the keen perspective you provide in a call from NEMA for imperative information. What’s your best meal you ever cooked? And do you have any advice to the cooking novice?

One of my signature dishes is Coconut-Macadamia Nut Crusted Halibut with Mango Salsa. There’s nothing better than Alaskan halibut, and during the long, dark, cold winters up here, mango salsa gives a much-needed taste of the tropics. My lovely wife Tracy may not agree (she’s a natural cook), but my best advice is to simply follow the recipe. When starting out, the Internet is full of great recipes by professional and home chefs. Follow their instructions, and you usually cannot fail.

Some prefer the 19th hole; some prefer the range; but you love a great round of golf. What is your favorite course you played? And what is your ultimate golf story?

My favorite course so far is Troon North in Scottsdale, AZ. Shout-out to my future playing partner Director Allen Clark! I promise we’ll get a round in soon.

In Alaska, we are accustomed to letting wildlife like moose, black, and grizzly bears play through. Honestly, I don’t even think about them when I’m playing a round. You just give them space and everything is typically fine. Speaking of NEMA, golf, and wildlife, I was able to get a round in with Tracy during the Annual Leadership Forum in Savannah a few years ago. On the first hole, we drove up to the green and saw the biggest, scariest dinosaur I’ve ever seen in my life. In my eyes that alligator was all of 15 feet long! He decided to block our way to the next tee box, and then crawled up onto the green and plopped down right next to our balls. I called the Pro Shop in a panic. They said, “Oh. That’s just Fred. Give him space and he’ll eventually move on.” As Fred moved off the green and up the first fairway, the single golfer behind us didn’t see him, and was obviously driving right towards him. I ran down the fairway like a crazy person waving my arms and yelling. The poor guy thought he might have hit us with his ball. But I personally feel like I was a hero that day. Tracy, on the other hand, couldn’t stop shaking her head. That night at the 19th hole at the NEMA hotel, I’m pretty sure Fred grew to 20 feet long!

Bryan’s Coconut-Macadamia Nut Crusted Halibut with Mango Salsa

Ingredients:

4 each 6-ounce fillets halibut (Alaskan halibut!!!)
 1 each 14-ounce can coconut milk
 ¼ Cup Honey
 ¾ Cup Macadamia Nuts
 1/3 Cup Panko Breadcrumbs
 1/3 Cup Unsweetened Shredded Coconut
 ½ Teaspoon Salt
 ¼ to ½ Teaspoon Cayenne Pepper
 2 Eggs
 Peanut Oil or Coconut Oil for Frying

Mango Salsa

1 Ripe Mango, cut into ½ inch dice
 ½ Reg Bell Pepper, finely chopped
 1 Jalapeno, finely chopped
 1 Teaspoon Fresh Ginger, peeled and minced
 ¼ Cup Fresh Lime Juice
 ¼ Cup Extra-Virgin Olive Oil
 ½ Teaspoon Coarse Salt
 ¼ Teaspoon Fresh Ground Pepper
 3 Scallions, white, pale-green, and dark green parts diced

Directions:

1. Plan a bucket-list trip to Alaska and catch some fresh Alaskan Halibut!
2. Combine the coconut milk and honey. Place trimmed halibut fillets in the mixture and marinate for 1 hour in the refrigerator.
3. Combine all salsa ingredients in a bowl, and garnish with scallions. Place in the refrigerator to marinate.
4. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
5. Toast both the panko and macadamia nuts for 5-10 minutes or until just starting to brown.
6. Transfer the toasted panko to a shallow bowl.
7. Using a food processor, or by hand, chop the macadamia nuts. (Don’t overdo it in the processor, as they can get mushy)
8. Add the chopped nuts, shredded coconut, salt, and cayenne pepper to the panko breadcrumbs and mix.
9. In another shallow bowl, beat the eggs.
10. Remove the halibut fillets from the coconut milk marinade, scraping off as much of the marinade as possible.
11. Salt and pepper the fillets to taste. Dip in the eggs, coating on all sides.
12. Next, dip the fish in the panko mixture making sure to cover as much of the fish as possible, pressing the mixture into the flesh.
13. Heat peanut or coconut oil in an oven-safe skillet to medium-high heat.
14. Add the fillets, and cook until golden brown (about 3 minutes). Carefully flip and cook the other side.
15. Once both sides have turned a golden brown, place the skillet in the oven to finish cooking (about 7-8 minutes).

Transfer to plates or a serving dish, and top with Mango Salsa.



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