For a decade the Gulf of Maine has warmed faster than over 99% of the world's oceans, so it needs its own hero.

Fortunately, it's got one! Winner of the Peter Benchley Award Hero of the Seas in 2017 and named a White House Champion in 2016, Robin Alden of Stonington has done extraordinary work on behalf of Maine's coastal communities. Anyone who makes a living in the fisheries, or enjoys eating seafood, has benefitted from her work. In 2017 she will win the award that may mean the most to her: Grand Marshall of the pirate-themed Fourth of July parade in Deer Isle/Stonington. Look for her waving from a convertible!

Robin Alden has come a long way from her childhood in Cambridge, Massachusetts, but she's the same person. Brilliant, determined, gutsy, with a warm and ready smile, Robin thinks holistically and in terms of systems, habits of mind she learned from her father, who was a teacher in Cambridge. A skilled sailor, for several summers he ran the Yacht Club in Prouts Neck, Maine. He and his family lived in an apartment above the Post Office, and Robin often tagged along as he tended to boats, helping him as
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she could. This early introduction gave her confidence in handling boats and being on the water, but perhaps even more important, her father taught her to observe. "He was a fine-scale ecologist. He taught me the importance of observing creatures to understand them," she explains. Then, when she was only sixteen, her beloved father died.

Robin was a member of the freshman class at Yale when it first admitted women, but says, "It was not a good fit." She missed her father, and her major, medieval history, wasn't absorbing. Instead, Maine, the place he had taught her to love, called her home. Robin spent time at Hurricane Island, free-lancing for the local paper, waitressing and learning how hard it is to dig clams. In 1973 at the age of 22, she covered a meeting where she heard a shrimp biologist and several fishermen trying to talk about the shrimp fishery. Listening to their exasperation and impatience made her realize that they each brought valuable insights, knowledge and perspective to the conversation, but they weren't hearing each other. She concluded that they needed a better way to share what they knew that made them feel safe both to disagree and listen.

With no funding or experience in publishing and little but brains and bravado, Robin Alden co-founded Commercial Fisheries News with local publisher Nat Barrows to meet that need. From 1978 to 1996 she ran the paper, turning it into a successful publication that furthered the vision she has always had: "bring people together to develop solutions. She reasoned that the skills of fine-scale
In the mid-seventies Robin Alden co-founded the Maine Fishermen's Forum, which celebrated its forty-second year in March, 2017 and brings hundreds of fishermen and their families, as well as regulators, and scientists together.

observation fishermen have developed so well and the rigorous perspective of scientists might find answers to the challenge of a changing fishery. She also found time to study at the University of Maine, earning a degree in economics in 1978.

In the mid-seventies Robin Alden co-founded the Maine Fishermen's Forum, which celebrated its forty-second year in March, 2017 and brings hundreds of fishermen and their families, as well as regulators, and scientists together to think about the fisheries of the Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank. It also offers the best seafood I've ever tasted as well as a full plate of discussions, forums, and opportunities to socialize. "Always include ways for people to socialize," Robin learned early from mentor and friend Jim Wilson, co-founder of the forum and an economist at the University of Maine at Orono. "It helps them get to know and trust each other."

And, she met Ted Ames who grew up in Vinalhaven and was both a long-time fisherman from a fishing family as well as a trained
scientist. He later combined his fishing knowledge with science as an historical ecologist. His analysis of the cod population based on interviews with older fishermen earned him a MacArthur Fellowship. Robin and Ted married in 1987. It is an extraordinary partnership.

In 1996, Robin was recruited by Governor Angus King to head the Department of Marine Resources. Working in Augusta while her family lived in Stonington, however, was brutal for her, Ted, and their young child. Though she deeply loved her job, after three years Robin resigned to be with her family, a decision she says, "I have never regretted."

When one door closes, another may open, but sometimes you have to push. Together with her husband, and Ted Hoskins, the longtime pastor of the Isle au Haut church and boat minister for the Maine Sea Coast Mission, Robin started Penobscot East Resource

EASTERN MAINE SKIPPERS PROGRAM

Fishing has always been a dangerous job that requires great skill, but today that is even more true. Fishermen must be comfortable being involved in fisheries regulations and collaborative research, as well as using advanced technology, competing in a national and international market, and dealing with the challenges of a changing climate and fish populations. How best to prepare Maine's fishermen for the life they want to lead as adults? Bring them as high school students into a program that uses the skills they have already learned to expose them to a real-world academic program that helps them graduate with knowledge of marine ecology, navigation, marine engineering, public policy and communications skills to influence the future of an industry and way of life they love. Whether career fishermen or aspiring marine biology PhDs, today's and tomorrow's professionals need intensive preparation for a co-management role in a complex and challenging fisheries environment. In short, let them study through the Eastern Maine Skipper's Program.

penobscoteast.org/programs/eastern-maine-skippers-program
Center (PERC) in 2003. Its mission: to find ways for fishermen and government regulators to learn from each other. PERC’s motto, Fish Forever, affirms their conviction that fishermen, working with scientists and regulators can inform policy. Now, fourteen years later, PERC is thriving, employs twelve people, and was a co-founder of the Eastern Maine Skippers Program (see sidebar). In March PERC assumed a new name: Maine Center for Coastal Fisheries (MCCF) to better reflect its mission.

So now that the Commercial Fisheries News, MCCF and the Maine Fishermen’s Forum are so successful, what is Robin doing?
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Robin Alden and Dennis
Damon on Sunbeam
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It seems likely that Robin will continue to identify problems that need to be solved, and ways to bring people with different experience and expertise together to solve them. For all that she has done, and all she will do, she's a true Maine hero.

She's leaving MCCF because, as a thoughtful administrator, she knows that for the original vision to thrive, it must live beyond her time at the helm. Robin says that about five years ago, while looking at an actuarial table, she realized that they needed to take steps to assure the organization would survive if the founders were no
longer around to guide it. "We've built up staff and board so it isn't so founder driven and now we have to get out and let it sing its own song." Robin and her board have worked hard to make the transition as gentle and fruitful as possible by announcing four years ago that she would leave as Executive Director after 2017. Now, as that time approaches, MCCF is actively seeking a new director.

And what will she do next? Not even Robin and Ted know that, but after taking a deep breath, working as sternman for Ted, who fishes about 100 traps, Robin will figure it out. "I've had a chance to make a difference, which many people don't get. That means a lot. My life isn't long enough to get it all done. I haven't achieved everything, even within this organization; for example, I had hoped to further build up its development capacity. There's more to do!" It seems likely that Robin will continue to identify problems that need to be solved, and ways to bring people with different experience and expertise together to solve them. For all that she has done, and all she will do, she's a true Maine hero.