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Handmade Mats Recycle Old Lobster Trap Line

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By: Doreen Leggett



John and Alicia Morgan, creators of the Lobster Mat. DOREEN LEGGETT PHOTO

On a recent Saturday, John Morgan drove his battered red F350 pick-up onto a long dirt road that runs along the Chatham Municipal Airport.

The bed of the truck was full of lobster trap line of varying thickness and colors; a lobsterman getting rid of some of his old gear from a storage spot there had helped sling it aboard.



Instead, it was soon transformed into thick, durable doormats of varying hues and styles: “Lobster Mats,” as the company Morgan started with his wife Alicia, an interior designer, is called.

“We give it a second life,” said Morgan. “Every single one is handmade – we have homemade looms we built ourselves.”

They got the idea from watching a television show about a woman in Maine who made a similar item out of thinner, lighter line. Morgan, who works as a social worker in the Provincetown schools, was directed to a bunch of rope in Truro, and they started with that.

“It was like a mountain, we went through all of it during the summer,” Alicia said.

They ended up debuting their mats in Sandwich in 2018, more for fun than anything. But once people saw the rugged mats, which come in different styles and different weights (depending if the rope is 3/8 or 3/4 of an inch thick), they caught on fast.

“It became an accidental business,” said Alicia with a smile.

Businesses across the Cape began asking for the Lobster Mats, including Arcadia in Provincetown. John, standing by a pile of finished mats in his backyard, said he ended up driving to Provincetown every week during the summer to drop off the mats. He hefted one of the heavier mats; it weighs close to 20 pounds.

“We call them nor’easter proof because they don’t go anywhere,” he said, adding that they are also mildew proof.

Buoys on Main in Harwich Port also carries the Lobster Mats. Owner Michelle Archibald said she always tries to carry unique items made on the Cape.

“Every mat is different, based on what they get out of the ocean,” Archibald said. Some are wheat-colored, others tan, others have orange or varying shades of blue.

She said the Lobster Mats get a lot of attention. Although they come with a card that lets people know about the business, Archibald will talk about how the gear is upcycled instead of going to landfills or ending up in the ocean where it can entangle marine life.

“There is a nice story behind it, people like the message,” she said.



She was excited to hear the Morgans were also on the verge of launching a lobster wreath line.

The couple laughs when they describe their wreath work. Alicia tried five different prototypes before she had one that came out beautifully.

John grabbed one of the round, heavy, cast-offs.

“This is a weapon,” he said.

The two are still busy making the Lobster Mats as well.

“It’s like our new date night,” said Alicia. She’ll pour a glass of wine, he’ll have a bourbon, and they’ll work, listen to music and talk.

Each mat takes about 45 minutes and the last step is to heat the ends so they stick together. John theorized that they could probably pursue a life of crime because neither one of them have fingerprints anymore.

They continue to pick up gear from lobstermen all over the Cape, usually paying \$100 for a load, which is about the price of their larger mats. Laura Ludwig at the Center for Coastal Studies in Provincetown sends people their way, and a portion of proceeds always goes to that nonprofit. They also give to other community organizations on a rotating basis.

One of their steady rope suppliers is Marc Palombo from Sandwich. He thought it was a great idea the minute he heard about it. His old gear has already been upcycled in other spots, including an enormous art installation in New York.

“I guess I would classify myself as a conservationist,” Palombo said. “There are ways to get rid of this stuff that are good for the environment.”

Palombo, who lobsters in the Terri-Ann (named after his wife), has a lot of gear and he keeps a spreadsheet of what he has to switch out. When he gets new gear the old goes to the Morgans, and he has a Lobster Mat created out of rope he fished with, as do other lobstermen.

Archibald has been thinking her blue door is in need of a nice mat. She knows just the candidate.

“That one might come home because it’s cute,” she said with a laugh.

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Ellsworth and Katherine Eldredge and children at the corner of Bank Street and Miles Street in Harwich, 1918. PHOTO COURTESY OF JOAN LYNCH

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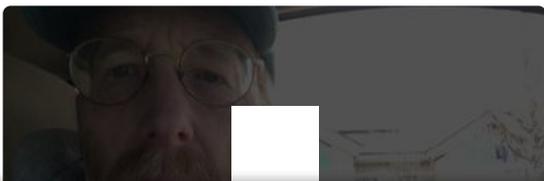


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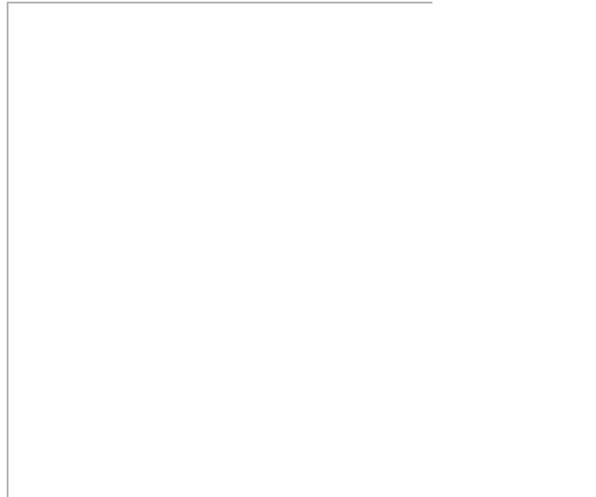
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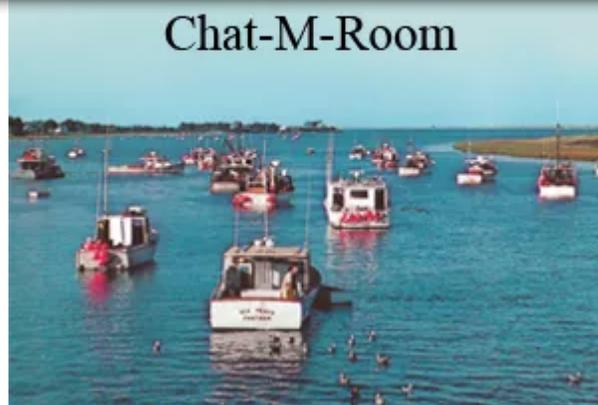


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