[MS-0494.002.003.009]

throu
Migd
Co
abou
the
said
the
Con
repr
earl
com
brai
bala

C
fou
Ga
sec
an
ch
re

Life-News photos by Ed Varley

MARKET OWNERS APPRECIATE WHAT FISH GAVE THEM

Mr. and Mrs. J. Earl Gilliam Sr. have mailbox in shape of fish, whose mouth drops open for mail, shown in photo above right.

Immortalized with mail box

Fish bring success

By ED VARLEY
Life-News Staff Writer

Passersby often stop at 2121 Paradise St., Encanto, to admire the large golden fish serving J. Earl Gilliam and his wife, Lula Mae, as a mailbox. But few realize that the unique mailbox a symbol of appreciation for fish.

"I've been in the fish business for 28 years," Mr. Gilliam said, "and fish have been mighty good to me."

MR. AND MRS. Gilliam had discussed for many years how to show their appreciation for the good fortune fish brought them.

And in 1972, Mrs. Gilliam visited the Esperanto Iron Works in San Diego.

"I just described what I wanted and they built it," she said.

"I knew Lula Mae was up to something but I wasn't sure what," her husband Earl said.

"It sure was a nice Christmas present.

"You know, there's two reasons why I've been able to get ahead in this world and the most important one is Lula Mae. Never would've made it from South Carolina without her."

When the Gilliams came to San Diego from Newberry, a small town near Columbia, they established the Louisiana Seafood Market at 2853 Imperial Ave.

MOST OF the fish sold at Gilliam's market are fresh water fish brought in from the east, particularly the Southern states. Though it may seem like the old British adage of futility, "Bringing coal to Newcastle," to import fish to a city where one of the biggest industries is fishing, it is one example of Gilliam's desire to cater to his customers' taste.

"Lotsa folks from back east living here in San Diego," he said, "and they know there's nothing so tasty as fresh water fish from Georgia or Alabama or red snapper caught in the Gulf."

Gilliam even has 600 pounds of "real Georgia stone ground corn meal" coming in to satisfy customers' desires. People even order by letter. He got a letter from a lady in New Orleans a few years back.

"She was the aunt of a big Navy admiral whose son was stationed in San Diego. She learned that I carried a brand of coffee that was hard to find, except in the South," Gilliam said. "She sent me a check and three sailors and three marines came by to pick up the coffee."

The big Navy admiral was former chief of Naval Operations, Arleigh "31 Knot" Burke.

"MEETING SO many nice people is another thing I owe to fish," Gilliam said, "and as long as I feel I'm doing some good for people and they appreciate it, I'll keep on selling fish even though Junior is always after me to retire."

Junior, his son, is San Diego Municipal Court Judge J. Earl Gilliam Jr. There was a bright glow of pride in the elder Gilliam's fce when he showed the picture of his son dressed in his black court robes. Pride was also in his voice when he said "My daughter, Mildred, teaches school in Oklahoma City."

ACCORDING TO Mrs. Gilliam, Mildred was grownup before the Louisiana Seafood Market was opened but the business paid for the education their son needed to become a judge.

"So, you see, we have a lot to be thankful for in our lives," J. Earl Gilliam, Sr. said, "and maybe the world won't know that the mailbox is our way of showing that we appreciete what fish have done for us, but we know ... Don't we, Lula Mae?"