

Crescent Seafood and Deli - from the dock to the dining table

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Kurt Hochberg has been making a living as a seafaring fisherman since 1973.

When he brought his boat Rogue up from the Bay Area in 2006 for the crab fishing off the shores of Crescent City, he liked the area so much he decided to stay.

He saw an opportunity to transition selling his fresh catches from off his boat to a storefront on the pier. But a funny thing happened on his way to owning Crescent Seafood Fresh Fish Market. Customers wanted someone else to prepare that fresh catch into their meal.

"I never really thought I'd be cooking for people," Kurt said. "It was the last thing that was on my list of things to do.

"We originally started this business as a retail seafood market. But there had to be 30% of people who could find us back here turning around and walking out because we couldn't sit them down and feed them."

Through necessity, Hochberg and his wife, Terri, changed their business plan, rebranded themselves and reopened as Crescent Seafood and Deli.

“It’s kind of like Taylor Sausage if I had to compare it to another company,” he said.

In her 30 years married to Kurt, Terri said owning a restaurant was the last direction she thought they would take. “I only said yes to a fish market. In my wildest dreams I never thought we’d be doing a restaurant.

“Every day I’m blown away by how big men will come in here and look for smoked eggs, funny things that we do here that I would take for granted, not think that much of. They like what we do, apparently,” Terri said.

Born in San Francisco and raised in the Bay Area, Kurt had an advantage over other boat captains with decades of experience who might look to transition into helming a restaurant instead.

He had made the most of his time delivering his fresh catches to the kitchens of some of the Bay Area’s finest restaurants.

“I’ve spent some quality time at restaurants like Chez Panisse, Scoma’s, Capurro’s, Spenger’s, Kingston, just really high-end restaurants in the Bay Area,” Kurt said. “I sold a lot of seafood to those restaurants.

“I was usually the guy coming in through the back door, not the front door, providing them with fresh salmon, albacore and crab. You hang around those kitchens long enough and you start picking things up.”

Kurt said he was lucky enough to spend some quality time back in those kitchens with renowned chefs like Jean Pierre and Alice Waters, just seeing how a lot of their dishes were prepared.

“It is real simple cooking. Nothing is coming out of a box. So everything we use in this market is fresh seafood,” he said.

When he’s not unloading fresh crab, salmon or albacore from his own boat, depending on the season, Kurt buys fresh seafood from all over the world, whether it is from the East Coast, West Coast, Gulf Coast, Alaska or overseas. He’s even got tuna flown in from India and Norway.

Then he developed a menu. Kurt said a lot of Crescent Seafood’s recipes basically come from his past in the Bay Area and working out of Mexico and San Diego.

“We sell a lot of cioppino, seafood prima vera and white wine pasta. Also, we’ve got a hot, spicy prawns that is one of my Szechuan recipes that we sell quite a bit here.

“A lot of clam chowder, fish tacos, prawn tacos and also a yellow fin tuna poke. We’re starting to do more seared yellow fin, it’s really good stuff,” Kurt said.

It took a while to develop a steady clientele since they opened their doors in April 2016. With their location tucked away in a corner of the pier off Marine Way, Kurt and Terri knew they had to refine their recipes to attract both locals and tourists off the beaten path.

“They’ve come to rely on us with consistent products. I’m a consumer, too. It’s nice to know I’ve got somewhere to go to get whatever I want. I hardly even cook at home anymore. I just pretty much eat here,” he said.

Kurt has kept with the times, utilizing social networking to attract more customers through Facebook, Instagram and Yelp.

“People have found us from other countries, too, who don’t speak English. They’ll do their own homework. I’ll have guys walk in here, standing at the cold case, see the iPhone in their hand with the Crescent Seafood icon flashing with the map, translated in Mandarin, Cantonese, Russian.

“Tucked away as we are, people find us,” he said.

Kurt said this was the first year he didn’t have to helm the Rogue and Crescent City’s kitchen, as he hired a full-time captain responsible for bringing in their fresh catches for him.

Which begged the question: Which is tougher, helming a fishing boat or helming a commercial kitchen?

“Depending on the workload, I’d say it’s almost tougher running the market here than it is running the boat at times,” Kurt said.

“During the summer months, it seems like you can’t get a break. You gotta’ get here between 6 and 7 in the morning to get the chowder going, get your prep list knocked out, everything tuned up for the rest of the day. Otherwise, you never catch up with things.

The summer months, I’m constantly making chowder, cioppino, crab cakes, all our sauces, pastas, grits. It’s just non-stop.

“When this place gets busy, the volume of traffic picks up, usually April on through the summer,” he said.

Kurt said one key to his success has been the relationships he built with the other restaurants in the community. “It’s been interesting working with outfits like the Chart Room, Sea Quake, Port O’Pints. It’s been great to see all these businesses develop and grow.

“As a seafood market, we’ve done business with just about everybody. Harvest Cafe, Northwoods, Toreros, I’ve sold seafood to just about everybody in town at one point or another.

“Where else are you going to go? If you’re looking for fresh salmon, steelhead, albacore, this is it,” he said.

Another key to developing a successful business is captaining a crew at the restaurant who are on the same page as he is.

“I’ve been through a lot of people in the last four years. I really like the crew I’ve assemble here. I’ve got three key cooks I rely on. They’ve got our menu down pat,” he said.

Finally, he credits his wife Terri ... working hard, doing the yeoman’s work in the business. But she’s quick to deflect the credit for their success back at her husband.

“I really think it’s Kurt’s talent that’s key,” Terri said. “I have an imagination for food and I like mixing things up, with fruit, spices, unconventionally, makes me creative in that sense, too. Maybe we’re just a good pair together.”

Crescent Seafood is located at 170 Marine Way and is open year-round, seven days a week, except for Christmas, Thanksgiving and New Year’s Day.